

## Corporealities

### Heather Webb and Derek Duncan

Discourses do actually live in bodies. They lodge in bodies:  
bodies in fact carry discourses as part of their lifeblood  
(Judith Butler)

Screens rather than lenses now mediate the pursuit of  
bodily truths (Paul Gilroy)

When Caroline Bynum wrote the article entitled 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective' in 1995, the author of so many landmark books on the topic noted the vast amount of writings on 'the body' and proposed to put the field into perspective.<sup>1</sup> As perhaps the leading figure in writings on medieval bodies, Bynum seemed the person to do it.<sup>2</sup> She noted then an incommensurability in discussions of 'the body' across disciplines, from philosophies of body working against Cartesian dualisms, to histories of the body, to a focus on sexuality, the construction of gender, and ethics.<sup>3</sup> Her essay sought to bring a more complex view of the past to the table, thus offering possibilities for a broadening of topics in our study of body, bodies, and embodiment across periods. Her tone of mild exasperation at the 'recent enthusiasms' of literary critics is one that continues to resound in continued work on corporealities ever since. There is, perhaps, too much work on the body,

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<sup>1</sup> Caroline Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry*, 22.1 (1995), 1-33.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley ; London: University of California Press, 1984), *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), *Fragmentation and Redemption : Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995)

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990); *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Zone; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

and yet we cannot avoid the fact that also today, as Bynum put it then, 'body or embodiment is an aspect of many conversations we are now having'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, for cultural critics or historians of Modern Italy, conversations about corporeality have become ever more pressing. New understandings of biopolitics and its technologies, mass demographic mobility, and the virulence of contemporary discourses on race and gender, often coalescing around trans-embodiments, mean that what Bynum called the 'fuss' is a compelling, urgent concern. In what follows, we have attempted to reflect on the differing ways that scholars in medieval and Early Modern Italian studies and scholars in modern Italian studies have dealt with the issue of corporealities. This is not to suggest any lack of continuities across periods, but instead reflects the ways in which discourses of corporealities have often taken different shapes in the scholarship.

***On Medieval and Early Modern Corporealities: Heather Webb***

I intend, with my portion of this essay, to ask some questions about methodologies, about the ways in which scholars in Italian medieval and early modern studies have been approaching corporeality recently. Since there are endless ways into a topic as potentially all-encompassing as this one, I will take one very specific lens for this discussion. I hope that, in its deliberate limitation, it may offer scope for the consideration of other issues within the study of corporealities in medieval and early modern studies. I will focus my discussion on what have sometimes been described as 'performances' of the Passion or of compassion as co-suffering by late medieval and early modern women religious, a broad term encompassing both nuns and laywomen working under the auspices of various religious orders. These are, fundamentally, foregroundings of the body as discourse, as a substitute for silenced female voices, and therefore offer an opportunity for reflecting more broadly on the terms we use and on the subjects we take up when considering historical corporealities that test the boundaries of the normative in terms of gender and the construction of voice.

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<sup>4</sup> Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?', p. 12.

There was a moment in which scholars of late medieval spirituality adopted the lens of the term 'performance' as a new way into the then still dominant discourse of 'the body' brought to the forefront of medieval studies by Bynum and others with books like *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* and the subsequent tide of research that followed.<sup>5</sup> The performance turn was brief, consisting of a few conferences and volumes and a smattering of articles that date from the late 1990s to about 2008. It was a moment when performance studies theorists had already begun to register frustration with the sheer proliferation of the application of the terminology of performance and performativity. I intend to revisit this critical moment in order to propose that the performance turn set the stage for what I think can be identified as the predominant current tendency in the consideration of medieval and Early Modern corporealities, affect studies. Attention to performance brought us to ask questions about audience perceptions, and the awareness of the audience; affect studies, informed by cognitive approaches, continually moves between considerations of affective responses within and outside of the text. In what follows, I will survey some recent work on late medieval and early modern women religious, along with case studies, in order to trace out an existing trend, but also suggest some possibilities for future research, in the study of corporealities that runs from 'the body' to 'performance' to 'affect'.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1999 volume, *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, Joanna Ziegler's introduction states that the collected essays wish to express: 'a perception of mystics as performers', and 'as artists who performed their mysticism.'<sup>7</sup> Ziegler uses the performance lens as a way to turn consciously away from ongoing work on 'the body' that dominated at the time, stating that the scholars in the *Performance and Transformation* volume are: 'working more with theories of performance than physicality'; and 'we are

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<sup>5</sup> Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> For recent work that places the embodied self at the intersection between social life and affective life, see Stephen J. Milner, "'Bene comune e benessere": Rhetoric and the Affective Economy of Communal Life', in *Emotions, Passions, and Power in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Fabrizio Ricciardelli and Andrea Zorzi (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), pp. 237-51.

<sup>7</sup> Joanna Ziegler, 'Introduction', in *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality*, ed. by Mary A. Suydam and Joanna E. Ziegler (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. xiii.

reorienting the discourse on the body ... toward a more performance-sensitive perspective.<sup>8</sup> Clearly here there is a sense that it may be too late for discourse on 'the body' and that 'performance' seems to offer a useful way forward. Thus, explains Ziegler, the volume intends to move away from 'detached' documentation of physical acts and towards an accounting for the 'significance of the appearance of [physical] phenomena upon the audience in the context of a convincing ritual performance by the mystic.'<sup>9</sup> In other words, the critical gesture moves the emphasis of analysis away from documentation of the acts themselves to ask instead how the audience is affected. This is indeed a compelling question, and precisely because it is a difficult one to address.

Almost a decade later, another key contribution, *Visualising Medieval Performance*, edited by Elina Gertsman, appeared in 2008.<sup>10</sup> Essays in the volume consider physical performances, spoken performances, and textual performances, understood in each case as something enacted before and for the sake of an audience.<sup>11</sup> We have many more accounts of late medieval women religious's physical performances than their spoken ones; as the essay by Beverly Kienzle in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena* notes, perhaps the most worrisome notion for male elites of the Middle Ages was that of a woman preaching.<sup>12</sup> Any hints of verbal behaviour that approached preaching were carefully circumscribed or even elided in hagiographical accounts.

While public physical performances or enactments were problematic spectacles as well, they did fit into existing prevalent tropes for speaking about women religious. Hagiographical accounts of holiness tended to focus on women's bodies rather than their words. Kienzle notes that the hagiographer of Umiliana de' Cerchi (1219-1246) explains that 'she preached more by deed than by word, and once dead, with her body she does not cease to preach.'<sup>13</sup> It is in

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<sup>8</sup> Ziegler, p. xiv.

<sup>9</sup> Ziegler, p. xx.

<sup>10</sup> *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> A central point of reference for the definition of performance employed here is Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory*, rev. edn (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>12</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Preaching and Hagiography in Renaissance Tuscany', in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco and Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 127-54.

<sup>13</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, p. 131.

fact only over the dead body of Catherine of Siena, laid out for the vast throngs who came to see it in the church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome in 1380, that a Master of Sacred Theology stated ‘This holy virgin has no need of my sermons, for she herself preaches and proclaims herself sufficiently.’<sup>14</sup>

Carolyn Muessig’s study of performances of the Passion in the later Middle Ages cites Phillip of Clairvaux (d. 1273) writing on Elizabeth of Spalbeek, who acted out the Passion in seven intervals throughout the day and with the added reception of the stigmata on Fridays, stating that no person can now say:

‘I can’t read or understand such profound mysteries as I am unlettered’ or ‘because the book is restricted’ because now the unlearned can read, not from parchments or charters, but from our aforementioned Elizabeth’s limbs and body, just as if she were a living and visible Veronica, just like a moving picture and animated narrative of redemption.<sup>15</sup>

Like the Veronica veil, a feminine relic imprinted with the face of Christ, Elizabeth’s female body is likened to a parchment, imprinted with the Passion of Christ, presented, made visible, and held up to the gaze of the unlettered masses.

Muessig’s work also presents Margherita of Cortona’s Passion performance that takes place in the Church of San Francesco of Cortona as it is reported by Fra Giunta Bevegnati, Margherita’s hagiographer and confessor. Margherita begins her visualisation of the Passion as if a witness. After mass she shouts out statements such as ‘Now I see he is brought out of the palace!’ But then a transition happens, and rather than reporting what she sees, she begins to undergo or perform a sort of crucifixion. The account reads as follows:

it seemed to them [those present in the church] that Margherita was not next to the cross but on it, tormented by awful pains.... Indeed at the ninth hour she lost her external sense of sight, so that she was not aware of the crowd of weeping people closely watching her, nor of the faces or voices

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<sup>14</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Carolyn Muessig, ‘Performance of the Passion: The Enactment of Devotion in the Later Middle Ages’, in *Visualizing Medieval Performance*, ed. by Elina Gertsman, pp. 129-42 (p. 131).

of the ladies who were attending and holding her.... When the hour of our Lord and Savior's death arrived – namely the ninth hour, when he hung his head and the sacred breath was emitted, at that moment Margherita bowed her head resting it on her chest, and we all believed that she was dead because she was motionless and unconscious. And she stayed like this without weeping from the ninth hour until evening in front of the friars and the other people who were standing around.<sup>16</sup>

It is reported that the people of Cortona came flocking to see Margherita's witness and then enactment of the passion, and were moved to tears. After twelve hours, Margherita comes to herself. And only then, according to her hagiographer, did she realise that she was not in the privacy of her own cell and that she was before a vast audience. As her hagiographer tells it, she panicked, until the Lord spoke to her and explained 'Do not fear or be in doubt about all these things that happened around you and in you today, because I have made you a mirror for sinners however obstinate, that through you they may perceive how freely I bestow my mercy on them so that they may be saved.'<sup>17</sup> The efficacy of the performance has to do with the hagiographer's insistence that Margherita is unaware of the audience. According to Muessig, the audience could perceive Christ's suffering not as a distant historical event but a proximate reality filled with emotion.<sup>18</sup> Margherita moves from seeing Christ's suffering to feeling Christ's suffering and showing it forth through her own body to the assembled crowd. Her immobilized body ultimately shows them Christ's death as immediately visible, tangible, and moving, as the hagiographer emphasises with reference to the tears of the townspeople.

A 2010 book by Sarah McNamer, entitled *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, considers the literary affective meditations on the Passion that 'ask their readers to imagine themselves present at scenes of Christ's suffering and to perform compassion for that suffering victim in a

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Muessig, p. 132.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Muessig, p. 132.

<sup>18</sup> Muessig, p. 133.

private drama of the heart.<sup>19</sup> This is a tradition that McNamer studies in the Middle English context but is just as important in the Italian context though we may query the private nature of this compassion in Italy, where reading was often done collectively and little privacy was available to most.<sup>20</sup> Compassion was often not only cosuffering with imagined scenes but cosuffering with family members and neighbours.

McNamer has also recently produced a new edition of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, a fourteenth-century text composed in Tuscany.<sup>21</sup> It had been assumed that the longer Latin text, *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, was composed first, by a Franciscan friar identified as pseudo-Bonaventure. McNamer posits instead that this vernacular *testo breve* may in fact have been an earlier version of the *Meditations*, composed by a woman, a Poor Clare from Pisa. The Latin expansion, thought to be composed for a Poor Clare, would then be subsequent to the text witnessed by the Oxford Bodleian Library MS Canonici Italian 174. Whether written by a woman or for a woman, or both, the *Meditations* consist of a series of guided meditative exercises that take as their starting point the main episodes in the life and passion of Christ, elaborating details beyond the bare bones of the scriptural narrative, details that tend towards the sensorial and the affective.

The Latin text, which has more extensive framing for the elaborated narration, offers some clear indication of what the reader was meant to do with the text: 'So, if you wish to profit from all this, Sister, you must place yourself in the presence of whatever is related as having been said or done by the Lord Jesus, as if you were hearing with your own ears and seeing it with your own eyes',<sup>22</sup> or put another way later in the text: 'simply make yourself present in the very place

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> On reading as group activity and the inclusion of specifically female 'readers' with various levels of literacy in the late medieval and early modern periods in Italy, see Abigail Brundin, Deborah Howard, and Mary Laven, *The Sacred Home in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2018), pp. 149-174.

<sup>21</sup> *Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, ed. by Sarah McNamer (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. from the original Latin and ed. by Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2000), p. 4.

where, before your eyes, it occurs to your mind that events were taking place.’<sup>23</sup> In other words, the narration of the words and deeds of Jesus and those around him is intended to be experienced as if present to the senses in the first person. There are further instructions set out as to the timing of the meditations; the life of Christ is divided over the days of the week. This sort of regular meditative practice is clearly that which Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Margarita of Cortona engage in. But in both cases, the ‘internal’ repeated meditation has led to a visible corporeal performance in the presence of neighbours.

One can see how the level of detail that the *Meditations* provides would allow for vivid embodied visualisations. For instance, we may consider the discussion of the crucifixion itself (and here I turn to the Italian text):

Et inchiodado che haveno la mano drita, si branchorono la sinistra et quella non çonçea al buso. Alora quelli maledeti sì comerçorono a tirarla per força per farla g[i]onçere al segno. Et tanto gli tirò quello braço che tutti i nodi se largono, et tanto feceno che per força el feceno açonçere al suo luocho.<sup>24</sup>

Passages such as these seem expressly targeted to work on what Ellen Spolsky calls the reader's 'kinesic intelligence', or our capacity to perceive and interpret movement that is based on perceptual simulations.<sup>25</sup> The unnatural, horrific degree of stretching described here in the emphasis between the mismatching of the holes in the cross and the length of Christ's arms produces an immediate embodied response, inviting the reader to attempt to match (and presumably fail to match) this horror against her own experience of reaching, stretching, or pulling and being pulled. A 2011 collaboration between a literary scholar, Hannah Wojciehowski, and one of the neuroscientists credited with the discovery of mirror neurons, Vittorio Gallese, has suggested that techniques of embodied representation in art, whether textual or visual, allow readers (or viewers) to find partial matches with their own sensory experiences and

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<sup>23</sup> John of Caulibus, p. 332.

<sup>24</sup> *Meditations on the Life of Christ: The Short Italian Text*, p. 140.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen Spolsky, 'Elaborated Knowledge: Reading Kinesis in Pictures', *Poetics Today* 17.2 (1996), 157-80 (p. 159). See also Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), pp. 1-2.



memories, pairing this somatic memory with new concepts introduced by the text and thus producing representations of things that might otherwise have been unimaginable.<sup>26</sup>

McNamer suggests that 'to perform compassion – in the private drama of the heart that these texts stage – is to feel like a woman, in particular medieval iterations of that identity.'<sup>27</sup> How can we take this to help us understand women religious performing the role not of Mary witnessing the crucifixion but *of* the crucified? They are performing a male role in a very public drama. How do they adapt these particularly 'feminine', or supposedly interior and secluded, modes of meditation in order to create a physical spectacle? And how do they understand the public nature of that spectacle and the gendered valence of their roles? How can we, with the advantage of recent work that brings us to recognise the inherently embodied nature of reading and affective response, think about these medieval and early modern accounts of what is essentially an enacting of the Gospel narratives as a particularly female form of affective reading?

These questions may be brought into better focus through three further examples: Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), Stefana Quinzani (1457-1530), and Giovanna or Vanna of Orvieto (1264-1306). In each case we will consider how our understandings of, and discussions of publically visible physical acts, are inflected by dominant critical paradigms for thinking bodies, gender, performance, and affect. Catherine, Stefana and Vanna were all Dominican penitent women, members of a group of religious laity. Religious lay life was attractive to urban women who did not have enough wealth to enter overcrowded monasteries; the term penitent was used for laywomen who worked under Franciscan and Dominican orders. Penitent women often lived at home or with relatives or benefactors, visiting local churches and the homes of other penitents and relatives and thus were visible to townspeople as cloistered nuns never were.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hannah C. Wojciehowski and Vittorio Gallese, 'How Stories Make us Feel: Toward an Embodied Narratology', *California Italian Studies*, 2.1 (2011), unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup> McNamer, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> See *Dominican Penitent Women*, ed., trans. and introd. by Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, with contributions by Daniel E. Bornstein and E. Ann Matter (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005).

As Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner notes, ‘penitent women’s mystical experiences became public spectacles that contributed to the later medieval sense of God’s presence in all human affairs. Catherine of Siena fell into ecstasy on the streets of her native town,’ while people went to Vanna of Orvieto’s mistress’s house to witness her ecstasies. Stefana Quinzani’s imitations of Christ’s passion at the homes of her patrons were well-attended public spectacles. Lehmijoki-Gardner notes that ‘these public displays of the extraordinary and miraculous shaped later medieval piety and made penitents into local celebrities but women’s public piety also attracted sharp criticism.’ Jean Gerson and other late medieval theologians ridiculed people like Catherine of Siena and saw their popularity as a sign of end times.<sup>29</sup> When considering the particular role of Dominicans in a more pervasive culture of affective meditation, Lehmijoki-Gardner notes that it is: ‘the extreme concreteness with which Dominican penitent women celebrated Christ’s passion that set them apart from many other religious lay groups. Two manifestations of this tangible imitation of Christ’s passion were of particular importance: the stigmata and theatric performances of Christ’s crucifixion.’<sup>30</sup>

And it is in the Dominican context that we have another source that perhaps stands between the Franciscan practice of affective and empathetic meditation and the bodily spectacles that I am discussing here. The *De modo orandi corporaliter sancti Dominici*, or the *Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, was written by an anonymous friar, probably in Bologna, between 1260 and 1288.<sup>31</sup> The *Nine Ways of Prayer* dedicates itself to the saint’s postures of prayer outside the liturgical context, when, as Jean-Claude Schmitt puts it, ‘Dominic was alone face to face with God.’<sup>32</sup> But Schmitt also has to admit that Dominic is never really alone; his brothers always seem to be watching him, whether secretly or openly.<sup>33</sup> So here, too, whether acknowledged or not, Dominic’s prayer is a

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<sup>29</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 16.

<sup>30</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 17.

<sup>31</sup> See Simon Tugwell’s critical edition of the *Nine Ways of Prayer*: ‘The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic: A Textual Study and Critical Edition’, *Mediaeval Studies*, 47 (1985), 1-124. Translations are taken from *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, ed. and trans. By Simon Tugwell (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1978).

<sup>32</sup> Jean-Claude Schmitt, ‘Between Text and Image: The Prayer Gestures of Saint Dominic’, *History and Anthropology*, 1 (1984), 127–62 (p. 129).

<sup>33</sup> Schmitt, p. 130.

performance of corporeal piety with clear affective impact on his immediate observers and those 'observers' mediated through the text and images of the *Nine Ways*.

At the opening of the treatise on Dominic's modes of prayer, the friar/author explains that prayer 'so kindled the fervour of [Dominic's] good will that he could not contain it: his devotion showed quite plainly in his bodily members'.<sup>34</sup> Dominic's private conversation with God is thus also a visible manifestation for an audience of what prayer should look like. What the others see in Dominic's body is both the physical extension of the workings of Dominic's soul and, at the same time, a model of the way in which the body must work to tune a soul: 'the soul, as it causes the body to move, is in turn moved by the body',<sup>35</sup> or as it is put later: 'This manner of praying stirs up devotion, the soul stirring the body, and the body in turn stirring the soul.'<sup>36</sup> In the space of the treatise, Dominic's body is both model and agent.

Lehmijoki-Gardner notes that Dominican penitent women such as Giovanna of Orvieto and Stefana Quinzani were familiar with the *Nine Ways of Prayer*. One of the ways of prayer commemorates the cross: the *expandi*, an upright posture with arms outstretched. Interestingly, however, the treatise makes it clear that the pose is not intended for ordinary worship, though the saint does not explicitly forbid it to his fellows:

Sometimes our holy father Dominic was also seen praying with his hands and arms stretched out as far as they would go, in the form of a cross, and standing as upright as he could. This was how he prayed when God restored the boy Napoleon to life at his prayer at Saint Sixtus in Rome; he prayed like this both in the sacristy and in the church itself during Mass. [. . .] It was like Elijah raising the widow's

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<sup>34</sup> 'et accendebat feruourem bone uoluntatis in tantum ut mens cohibere non posset quin deuotionem membra corporis manifestarent certis inditiis' ('The Nine Ways of Prayer', p. 82; trans. is in *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, p. 11).

<sup>35</sup> 'ut anima mouens corpus remoueretur a corpore' ('The Nine Ways of Prayer', p. 82; trans. is in *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, p. 11).

<sup>36</sup> 'Talis enim modus orandi incitat deuotionem, alternatim ex anima in corpus et ex corpore in animam' ('The Nine Ways of Prayer', p. 82; trans. is in *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, p. 11).

son, when he stretched himself out over the boy's body. [. . .] And this was how the Lord prayed as he hung on the cross, his hands and arms stretched out, with great cries and weeping, and he was heard for his reverence. Saint Dominic did not use this kind of prayer except when he knew by God's inspiration that some great miracle was going to occur by virtue of his prayer.<sup>37</sup>

Lehmijoki-Gardner calls this one of Saint Dominic's favourite positions of prayer and thus explains it as natural that Dominican penitent women would take it up as well, as a posture for prayer.<sup>38</sup> But I would venture to suggest that this is a bodily performance that is particularly fraught. The *Nine Ways* suggests that Dominic hesitates to take on the shape of the cross, except in exceptional circumstances. The text also suggests that Dominic is not re-enacting the crucifixion per se, but is rather praying for someone else's specific resurrection -- a particular miracle. All this to say that women publicly imitating Christ's crucifixion is an act that the texts do not give us a clear precedent for. The radical nature of these performances is handled in the texts that recount them by description as if the audience was spying on something private. Just as the illustrations of Dominic and his ways of prayer depict him as if he believes he is alone, the treatise, written by someone who is not Dominic, gives us the sense that Dominic is continually spied upon by others, putting the viewer of the illustrations in the voyeuristic pose of Dominic's fellow friars who seem to be continually peering out at him from behind corners. In many of the hagiographical accounts, publics spectate what seem to be dead female (but also male) bodies, a kind of a necro-scopophilia that often does move between the spectating of bodies that seem to be dead and the spectating of bodies that really are dead. The accounts culminate when the holy corpses of these saintly women are eventually laid out and the appearance of death that they so miraculously showed forth in life is then present in its fullest.

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<sup>37</sup> 'The Nine Ways of Prayer', pp. 86-87; trans. is from *The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic*, p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 18.

In the *Legend of Vanna of Orvieto*, we read that during the feast of Peter and Paul, she meditated on their passions.

She first evoked the memory of Peter's passion. She experienced an immediate rapture and her body was fixed immobile in the same way that the apostle was suspended on the cross. Afterward, she reflected on the passion of Paul, and she was raptured in the same way so that her body lay prostrate and her neck stretched out, just as Paul had been stretched out when he was beheaded. As the virgin's soul received these gifts, her body lay lifeless so that if she would have been seen by someone who did not know, the person would have deemed her dead....During such a time, one could see swarms of mosquitos move freely on her uncovered and unmoving eyes, which she always kept half-open.[...]

On Good Fridays, as her mind was absorbed in the bitterness of the Passion, she did not have control over her senses, and her body was extended in the shape of the cross. Her body remained rigid, pale, and insensible in the same way that the body of the Lord had been when it was attached to the cross for ridicule. Those who happened to be present could hear that this painful stretching of the body resulted in what seemed to be such a powerful collapse of the bones that her limbs were loosened. One foot was placed on top of the other, and the members of her body felt notably sharp suffering, pain, and weakness.<sup>39</sup>

The account is notable for the way it crosses back and forth between the object of Vanna's reflection, whether Peter or Paul or Christ, Vanna's own physical mirroring of their pain, and the hagiographer's perception of Vanna's pain. The sensorial accounts of the witnesses testify to the sound of her body stretching, and apparently to Vanna's own sensation as perceived and perhaps felt by observers, transitioning seamlessly from the externally perceptible sound to sensation that would be internally experienced in Vanna's body: 'the members of her body felt notably sharp suffering'. We have hints throughout these episodes

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<sup>39</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 68.

that seep into the hagiographer's account and show that a public is watching, and that the spectacle is one that translates suffering from subject to subject. Vanna lived with a wealthy woman named Ghisla, perhaps initially working as her servant, and scholars believe that Ghisla would have invited townspeople to her house to witness Vanna's ecstasies. All this is hard to trace, in that the account tends to occlude such witnessing. We see the hagiographer grappling with the problem when he writes: 'Lest the wind of vainglory snatch her from herself, the virgin hid these gifts of grace as long as she could. She kept them to herself, because she was afraid to submit what was done for Christ to human praise. But ... her sanctity could not be hidden but would be revealed for many.'<sup>40</sup>

Her final public performance was the laying out of her body in the Church of San Domenico at the convent of the Friar Preachers of Orvieto. As the hagiographer recounts 'As her inanimate holy body lay on the bier, there was such a sudden abundance of marvelous odor that it spread over all people.... It is most wonderful to speak about or to witness how the crowd standing by the virgin's bed had the most diverse sensations of the kinds of odors that emerged from the one and the same virginal body at the same moment. Some stated that they sensed the odor of lilies, some the odor of violets, and many others a mixture of aromas.'<sup>41</sup> The emphasis falls, once again, on the sensorial intensity of Vanna's presence, even in death and on the affective response of those in the crowd

Stefana Quinzani of Orzinuovi (1457-1530) was also a domestic servant. But her dramatic ecstasies and imitations of Christ's passion were so well-known that she became a spiritual guide to leading magnates of her time. Some of her performances of the passion were attended by the ruling family of Mantua, the Gonzagas. We have an account of one of her passion performances that is signed by 21 witnesses. The event took place in 1497 in the house of Stefana's master. It was one of her weekly four-hour ecstasies. It begins with temptations by the devil, who accuses her of vainglory: 'Many people want to see you. You want

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<sup>40</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 71.

<sup>41</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 75.

them to call you a saint.'<sup>42</sup> We then get a description not only of the performance, but also of audience participation:

her hands are tied above her head with insoluble but invisible straps, and her feet are tied as well. She is like Christ when he was tied to the pillar. Her visible bodily movements make it clear that she is being invisibly flagellated.... Many of those who were present made efforts to separate the hands, but they did not succeed, even though many used great force. Indeed, it was not possible to move even a finger.... Her torments and afflictions were so great, and she let out such weeping laments and sighs that it would not be possible for a human heart to think or to comprehend such pain unless one witnesses it with one's own eyes. And, even then, it is impossible to explain completely the pain in a human tongue.<sup>43</sup>

In a later phase, the witnesses note that 'if somebody even lightly touches her forehead with a finger or a small object, immediately the pains, cries... return... because she feels the intense pain of her crown.'<sup>44</sup> Again, the physical manipulation of Stefana's body, and indeed participation in her suffering is an important part of the spectacle, in which the audience can touch, pull, prod, and note the effect, or lack of effect of their intervention in Stefana's experience.

In the next phase, the forces that manipulate Stefana's body are not visible to the audience: 'Then her right arm is stretched on the side, and it is as if her hands were fixed with real nails. And, immediately, one sees how the joints are pulled and extended, the veins raised, and her hands become black.... As her legs are pulled out, the entire body curves out.' After an enactment of her death on the cross, Stefana then begins to pray out loud at some length and then asks 'Lord, I pray to you that you take away this visibly manifested pain and give me all the other sufferings, even greater ones, if only they are invisible. This way I will not be famous during my lifetime.'<sup>45</sup> And then she returns to her senses. This account, which is not a hagiography of the usual sort, gives us far more insight

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<sup>42</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 194.

<sup>43</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, pp. 194-95.

<sup>44</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 195.

<sup>45</sup> *Dominican Penitent Women*, p. 195-97.

into the performance understood as performance with an audience and the anxieties that this awareness induces. We get a sense of an audience is led to comprehend the pain through witness and even touch. To borrow from Stephen Milner's terms, pain is here 'an effect of circulation, the product of encounter and interaction rather than something possessed or internalised.'<sup>46</sup> Stefana's body renders the mediated nature of this experience visible.

I'd like to conclude with a few thoughts on Catherine of Siena. Catherine did not do passion performances per se. But one of her letters depicts a public performance of com-passion, or co-suffering, at an execution. Letter 273, addressed to her confessor, Raymond of Capua, discusses the execution of a young man as an enactment of the crucifixion, in which the young man's death enacts the sacrifice on the cross and Catherine's own participation enacts the same sacrifice. Just as the *Meditations* insist that Mary hung with her Son on the cross, so Catherine understands herself as executed with the prisoner and with Christ. In the description in her letter, Molly Morrison has argued that Catherine transforms the event into a 'sacra rappresentazione' or holy performance.<sup>47</sup> Above all, it is an example of a comforting ritual, usually carried out by members of confraternities who would accompany the condemned, help him make confession, and, by showing images of Christ crucified and by other means, convince the condemned that their execution was a re-enactment of Christ's crucifixion. Like Elizabeth of Spaaelbeck as a Veronica, Catherine is described by Morrison as a substitute for the usual 'tavoletta' or devotional painting.<sup>48</sup> Her physical body stands in for a static visual representation, an incarnate mediation between Christ and the devout observer.

Catherine stages her own martyrdom as well as Niccolò's, placing her own head on the block, and then, when Niccolò is decapitated, catching his head in her lap, covering herself with his blood. Catherine writes, 'Empissi allora l'anima mia tanto, che, essendo ivi moltitudine del popolo, non poteva vedere creatura.'<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Milner, p. 238.

<sup>47</sup> Molly Morrison, 'St. Catherine of Siena and the Spectacle of Public Execution', *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture*, 16.3 (2013), 43-55.

<sup>48</sup> Morrison, p. 45.

<sup>49</sup> *Le Lettere di S. Caterina da Siena*, ed. by Niccolò Tommaseo and Piero Misciattelli, 6 vols (Florence: Giunti, 1940), IV, p. 176 (letter 273).



If today cognitive scientists have led us understand our sensory perception of the actions of others to involve embodied simulation on our part, such understanding may be crucial for getting closer to what Catherine conceives without the benefit of neuroscience and expresses in her letter clearly as a sequence of mediations of affective experience: Niccolò's death recalls and re-enacts Christ's, called to his mind by Catherine's words and presence (standing in for the tavoletta image); Niccolò's death is not only witnessed, but also simulated by Catherine, who places her own head on the block. Again, the denial of the awareness of performance is central here. Catherine would have been very central and very visible on the scene of this execution, but, even beyond her own writing, the iconographical tradition does all that it can to push her into privacy. As Marco Gallo notes, the iconography of Catherine's particularity replaces human witnesses with angelic ones, and transports her body from the public spaces of churches to the private space of the cloister.<sup>50</sup> Her public visibility would make her the perceptual focus of the public's affective response; a female model was a charged one indeed.

To conclude: in the wake of 'all the fuss about the body', as Bynum put it in 1995, medievalists and early modernists turned to performance, and, most recently, are beginning to turn to discussion of affect and embodied simulations.<sup>51</sup> One emphasis ought not to exclude the preceding one. As I have endeavoured to show with some examples above, if we intend to expand Italian premodern studies beyond the limited, patriarchal canon, we need to work with the variety of methodologies necessary to be readers of bodies as well as readers of texts. How else will we find traces of the work of women like Stefana Quinzani, of whom all that is left is an account of the shape of her body?

### ***Thinking Bodies: Derek Duncan***

The editors' invitation to write on the topic of 'Corporeality' reminded me of 'Thinking Bodies,' a final year undergraduate module I put together at Bristol

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<sup>50</sup> Marco Gallo, *Studi di storia dell'arte, iconografia e iconologia: la biblioteca del curioso* (Rome: Gangemi, 2007), p. 139.

<sup>51</sup> Bynum, 'Why All the Fuss about the Body?'

University in the late 1990s. Its aim was to bring together some of the ideas about bodies and bodily experience that I had been exploring with students for some time through texts such as Sibilla Aleramo's *Una donna*, Anna Banti's *Artemisia*, and Luisa Passerini's *Autoritratto di gruppo*. Although all of these texts offered stern critiques of patriarchy and masculinity, they seemed less concerned with unpacking conventional and potentially deleterious representations of the female body than with affirming the body as the site of subjectivity, and embodied experience as productive of alternative knowledge and knowledge production. At the time, this complexity was for me most effectively rendered by Teresa de Lauretis's notion of the 'Io corporeo' as the material interface between the subject and the external world: 'un confine permeabile, una frontiera aperta (per così dire) tra il mondo esterno, il reale, gli altri, le istituzioni sociali, da un lato, e dall'altro il mondo interno della psiche, le pulsioni, l'inconscio, i meccanismi di difesa. In breve, possiamo divenire soggetti solo in quanto siamo corpi.'<sup>52</sup> 'Thinking Bodies' aimed to convey some sense of the complex place of the body in contemporary writing and cultural criticism, and the title played with different and sometimes contradictory understandings of the body as the object of external perception and judgement as well as identity's most defining intimate location. I selected primary texts for the module on the basis of how they tapped into major strands of contemporary debate on the body. Umberto Eco's *Il nome della rosa* was read through Foucault's work on biopolitics; analysis of Francesca Sanvitale's *Madre e figlia* and Dacia Mariani's *La lunga vita di Marianna Ucrìa* drew on feminist work on mother/daughter relationships, madness, and voice. Pier Vittorio Tondelli's *Camere separate* prompted reflection on illness and the body at the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In subsequent years as the module developed, I also included film incorporating Mario Martone's film adaptation of Elena Ferrante's *L'amore molesto*, and Marco Risi's *Meri per sempre* based on Aurelio Grimaldi's book of the same name. Set in the South, both films are about the racialisation of bodies and of non-normative embodiments of gender and sexuality.

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<sup>52</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Soggetti eccentrici* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1999), p. 134. See also Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: toward a corporeal feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

In many respects, the selection of primary material was driven, if not determined, by the range of secondary literature available, and the main focus was certainly on gender. The sacrifice of the unnamed girl in Eco's medieval homosocial romance offered a productive entry-point to many of the issues informing research on the body around that time. In consequence, the work of feminist theorists and critics who, from the late 1980s on, had irrevocably altered both the canon of Italian literature (at least in anglophone academia) and critical approaches to cultural analysis was fundamental to the course. This work was in part revisionist, engaged in the recovery and re-evaluation of women writers who had been marginalised or indeed completely excluded from literary history. In consequence, it also allowed readers access to women's experience and to differently gendered aesthetic practices.<sup>53</sup> What this work revealed was that women's writing was not singular or homogenous. While critics noted strong presence of biography and autobiography in writing by women, the forms of biographical writing varied. Language and form were tools of experimentation and resistance as well as oppression. History offered a creative resource as well as evidence of entrapment. As socio-cultural practices, maternity and the maternal bond served to transmit patriarchal values across generations, yet also intimated possibilities for the formation of new, gynocentric alliances and modes of empowerment. Contrasting perspectives on the figure of the mother usefully illuminated different feminist theoretical models and traditions. Historicist Anglo-American forms of patriarchal critique sat uneasily alongside Italian theories of sexual difference.<sup>54</sup> Yet across the complexity of all these debates, the question of the body remained unresolved, figured both catastrophically or euphorically, as the site of repression, power, freedom, and pleasure.

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<sup>53</sup> Letizia Panizza and Sharon Wood eds., *A History of Women's Writing in Italy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000). Graziella Parati, *Public Histories, Private Stories: Italian Women's Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996)

<sup>54</sup> By way of example only I cite two of the key early texts: Luisa Muraro, *L'ordine simbolico della madre*, (Rome: Riuniti, 1991); Adriana Cavarero, *Nonostante Platone: figure femminili nella filosofia antica* (Rome Riuniti, 1990). See also the essays in Graziella Parati and Rebecca West (eds), *Italian feminist theory and practice: equality and sexual difference* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002). Also Adalgisa Giorgio (ed.), *Writing mothers and daughters: renegotiating the mother in Western European narratives by women* (New York: Berghahn, 2002).

Published in 2000 and 2012 respectively, Rita Wilson's *Speculative Identities* and Patrizia Sambuco's *Corporeal Bonds* provide an invaluable and contrasting array of feminist engagements with the body in Italian literature of the late twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Focussing on women's writing of the 1980s, Wilson brings to the fore its innovative formal qualities arguing that its emphasis on literary experimentation and language allowed new identities to be envisaged. For Wilson, this represents a significant shift: 'Women no longer feel obliged to discover and reveal their corporeity, or to base their themes on the pain inflicted on them psychologically or by society'.<sup>56</sup> In her reading of Elisabetta Rasy's fascinating novel *La prima estasi* based on the autobiography of Teresa of Lisieux, Wilson nuances any suggestion of a radical separation between mind and body. Teresa's increasing inability to craft a coherent, linear narrative parallels the accentuation of her bodily malfunction: 'Corporeal pain exposes what is hidden in the mind; suffering releases the voice.'<sup>57</sup> In her reading of Rasy's novel, Wilson reveals the unruly and discomfiting capacity of the 'Io corporeo' to articulate protest beyond the mute suffering of the body.

Sambuco's corpus of primary material is not dissimilar to Wilson's yet her investigation is more directly informed by Italian feminist philosophy and theories of sexual difference with an emphasis on relationality between women and the identification/creation of a 'corporeal imaginary'.<sup>58</sup> Concrete initiatives such as 'affidamento,' the practice of nurturing between women, were accompanied by critical reflection on language itself in an aim to acquire a new non-patriarchal symbolic order. In many respects, Sambuco's work captures a particular way of thinking about the body that was highly influential in the 1980s and 1990s, but whose indifference to forms of social identity and practice other than those of gender or sexual difference became less viable as time went on and more flexible and inclusive critical hermeneutics were sought. That said, the clear gains made by Italian feminism in conceptualising the body as the site of

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<sup>55</sup> Rita Wilson, *Speculative Identities: contemporary Italian women's narrative* (Leeds: Northern University Press, 2000); Patrizia Sambuco, *Corporeal Bonds: The Daughter-Mother Relationship in Twentieth-Century Italian Women's Writing* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2012).

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, *Speculative Identities*, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Wilson, *Speculative Identities*, p.166.

<sup>58</sup> Sambuco, *Corporeal Bonds*, p. 24.

subjectivity with the creative potential to generate alternative practices of signification remains available for more expansive elaboration.

Since I put 'Thinking Bodies' together in the later 1990s, the landscape of corporeality has undergone some significant shifts and new theoretical paradigms have emerged to grasp the amplified understanding of its reach. The most significant of these has been a distinct departure from binary modes of categorisation or identification as the lived, sentient body has been posited as an ever more complex site of subjectivity and matrix of cultural accomplishment. The foundational role of gender is not downplayed, but its entanglement in other forms of difference is recognised as constitutive. This entanglement had already been implicit in work by earlier feminist critics. Sharon Wood, in her groundbreaking *Italian Women's Writing, 1860-1994* argued persuasively that the foundation of a unified Italy itself played a formative role in the identity construction and cultural production of women.<sup>59</sup> Post-Risorgimento rhetoric powerfully figured women as the 'mothers of the nation.' This disciplinary framework of constraint made women subject to the nation rather than promoting them as national subjects. Wood adds:

Almost one hundred years were to pass before the role of women could be conceived outside their biological or reproductive function, while regressive laws left them with little economic autonomy and no independence from family.<sup>60</sup>

Her succinct summation of women's position in post-Unification Italy stakes out the perimeters of their biological, legislative, and economic enclosure, and indeed, the imbrication of these three realms of confinement provide the basic co-ordinates for significant re-elaborations of the vagaries of embodied subjectivity in a self-consciously modern Italy.

Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg's *The Pinocchio Effect* charts, in extraordinary detail and with enormous intellectual rigour and subtlety, the anxieties

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<sup>59</sup> Sharon Wood, *Italian Women's Writing, 1860-1994* (London: Athlone Press, 1995).

<sup>60</sup> Wood, *Italian Women's Writing*, p. xii.

surrounding the 'making' of the Italian subject in post-Unification Italy.<sup>61</sup> Using Pinocchio as a metaphor for the uncertainties around what it meant to be and act as an Italian, Stewart-Steinberg contends that his liminality -- 'neither child nor adult; neither human nor inhuman; neither traditional puppet nor autonomous subject' -- best captures the sense of anxiety and crisis subtending national citizenship in late-nineteenth century Italy.<sup>62</sup> Pinocchio famously came with no strings attached and ended up a real boy, yet his uncertain transformation depended on the success of a carefully calibrated project of national pedagogy in which Pinocchio embodies 'both subjection and subjectivity, influence and autonomy.'<sup>63</sup> Stewart-Steinberg identifies an astonishing range of material and non-material mechanisms through which the postliberal subject was interpellated. Drawing extensively on Foucault's position that 'modern medicine is always first a social medicine, a hygiene politics, whereby the biological, the somatic, the corporeal turns the body into a social reality and medicine into a biological strategy',<sup>64</sup> she makes a compelling case for corporeality as the product of overdetermined politicisation, the social expression of a subject caught uneasily between identification and identity, that is between disciplinary surveillance and the inscription of subjectivity. The vicissitudes of this dichotomy are most tellingly explored through an examination of Cesare Lombroso's fascination with photography and its capacity to capture bodies, both physical and metaphysical. While his own attachment to spiritualism probably now seems an historical curiosity, his commitment to the categorisation of bodies to evidence racial degeneracy still resonates even if the technologies available for its management and maintenance have evolved.<sup>65</sup>

Stewart-Steinberg apprehends a national crisis in corporeality expressed, equally albeit to different effect, by female figures such as the infanticidal woman or by the therapeutic cult of Queen Margherita herself. Yet it is the 'crisis of male

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<sup>61</sup> Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: On Making Italians (1860-1920)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*, p. 46.

<sup>64</sup> Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*, p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Elena Past has traced the persistence of Lombroso's influence in Italian crime fiction. Especially pertinent is the 'Lombrosian fascination with the divide between the living and the dead' she notes in two of Gadda's novels: Elena Past, *Methods of Murder: Beccarian Introspection and Lombrosian Vivisection in Italian Crime Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), p. 17.

performativity' or of apposite forms of modern masculine embodiment that threatened to undo the nascent state. Her argument around the biopolitical imperatives of post-Unification Italy is supported by the attentive deployment of Roberto Esposito's 'immunitary paradigm' whereby the health of the nation's as well as the individual's body is secured by the management of ostensibly unhealthy elements. Rhiannon Welch also draws on Esposito in her study of post-Unification Italy and 'the constitution of racialized Italians in the context of biopolitics.'<sup>66</sup> Welch begins her study quoting Francesco Crispi's vision to recoup for the nation the thousands of Italians emigrating overseas. Imagining future colonies as 'arms,' he projected (re)productivity as the desired and indeed necessary condition of the nation's extraterritorial extension. Yet at the moment of utterance, these 'arms' had yet to embrace foreign territory, and Welch pursues the metaphor of these 'missing arms' as a means of exploring Italian anxieties around emigration, colonisation, and the South in the late nineteenth century. Rather than dwelling on the kind of physiological differences pivotal to Lombroso's criminal anthropology and the familiar, stereotypical expressions of racialised thought common to the period (and beyond), Welch works through corporeal rhetorics of loss, absence, and mutilation (Crispi's 'missing arms') to identify the mechanisms through which Italy anxiously acknowledged and disavowed its simultaneously imperilled and fortified self. Her emphasis on production and reproduction develops Wood's earlier sense of women's constrained position in late nineteenth century Italy, yet by reading gender through the prism of race revises binary constructions of difference exposing what Esposito refers to as the 'fracture' through which Italy is constituted.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Rhiannon Noel Welch, *Vital Subjects: Race and Biopolitics in Italy* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), p. 21.

<sup>67</sup> Welch, *Vital Subjects*, p. 19. Writing about the later Futurist movement, Paola Sica notes how women could fulfil the function of internal other as part of the improbable national balancing act familiar to Esposito:

Notions of decadence, degeneration, illness and even inferiority were often used to define what was considered as "other" by the hegemonic culture: an inconvenient 'other' which, if acknowledged, could transform the existent balance of power; but if denied, considered as inferior, or neutralized through absorption, could help to maintain the hegemony of those in power. 'Woman' belonged to the category 'other.'

Paola Sica, *Futurist Women: Florence, Feminism and the New Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 71.

Welch in fact identifies multiple ‘fractures’ which the ongoing processes of Unification tried to heal. Healed or not, the break in the limb remained a defining characteristic. Lombroso’s catalogue of the sick and deformed female, criminal, and southern bodies offered evidence that the nation was racially contaminated from within, an observation that has had a long and circuitous afterlife in Italian culture and ideas about nationhood.<sup>68</sup> The ‘racialisation’ of internal difference remains a familiar trope in Italian political discourses of identity to the present day. Gaia Giuliani has pursued the ramifications of this conflation in terms of what she calls the racism of the ‘colonial archive,’ directed as much against Italy’s ‘internal racialised others’ as against colonised subjects.<sup>69</sup> She notes that the function of ‘the racialised bodies of today, like those inherited from the past (southern Italians, Jews, the Roma, as well as the colonised)’ is to produce, by way of contrast, a normative version of Italian identity.<sup>70</sup> In this configuration which contemporary Italy inherits from Lombroso, ‘whiteness’ is not epidermal, but is a state achieved by the exclusion of all that is abject, and, in terms of the ‘immunitary paradigm,’ dangerous.<sup>71</sup> Giuliani notes the instrumentalization of gender under Fascism to produce distinct configurations of race. From a post-Lombrosian perspective, Italian women needed to be redeemed from the ‘*inherent* blackness’ of all women.<sup>72</sup> ‘Blackness’ was the signifier of untrammelled sexual appetite and Italian women effectively became ‘white’ through enforced restraint and the attribution/assumption of traditional, Christian values.

Recent research on Fascism and its contribution to the ongoing project of ‘making Italians’ stresses this tension between the state’s projection of values and their collective or individual internalisation. Discipline and performance, both in terms of public ritual and quotidian practice, were key to the fascist articulation of corporeal normativity. Work by historians such as Victoria de

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<sup>68</sup> For a brilliant analysis of its late nineteenth-century articulation see Barbara Spackman, *Decadent Genealogies: the rhetoric of sickness from Baudelaire to D’Annunzio* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

<sup>69</sup> Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 5

<sup>70</sup> Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy*, p. 6.

<sup>71</sup> Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy*, p. 9.

<sup>72</sup> Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy*, p. 78.



Grazia and Perry Willson has amply shown how women in the fascist period both resisted the regime's patriarchal norms and found space within them for the expression of a degree of relative autonomy. Natasha Chang's detailed analysis of the much-berated figure of the 'donna-crisi' who stood in abject opposition to ostensibly more wholesome 'donna-madre' exemplifies the contradictory rhetorical saturation of the female body under Fascism.<sup>73</sup> The 'crisis-woman' was a very Lombrosian figure, degenerately slim, childless, and almost in consequence, modern. Yet her urbane modernity also had appeal, and Chang notes how Irene Brin, the fashion writer and social commentator, actively espoused the freedom offered to modern women. Chang's study is productively read in tandem with Eugenia Paulicelli's *Fashion under Fascism*, in which she traces the array of the regime's vested interest in nationalizing the female body.<sup>74</sup> Paulicelli's analysis of the 1939, *Grande adunata delle forze femminili* where homogenously uniformed, female athletes paraded alongside women in traditional regional costumes underscores the common national purpose of diverse gendered embodiments.

The bodies of men as well as of women were instrumentalized by the regime. Alessio Ponzio effectively demonstrates the pedagogical imperatives of both Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in honing the minds and bodies of children and adolescents in an ambitious project of national regeneration: 'Over time, the regime would create a new kind of tough and strong-willed man, a fighter, a latter-day legionary of Caesar for whom nothing was impossible.'<sup>75</sup> Especially in the early years of Fascism, Mussolini himself appeared in both print and visual media as very embodiment of the new Italian man – virile, youthful, bellicose, self-contained.<sup>76</sup> Lorenzo Benadusi's work on male homosexuality as a discursive concept and practical activity demonstrates how a culturally correct corporeal public performance of masculinity made non-normative sexual behaviour

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<sup>73</sup> Natasha V. Chang, *The Crisis-Woman: Body Politics and the Modern Woman in Fascist Italy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Eugenia Paulicelli, *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Shirt*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> Alessio Ponzio, *Shaping the New Man: Youth Training Regimes in Fascist Italy and Germany* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015), p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Giorgio Bertellini, *The Divo and the Duce: Promoting Film Stardom and Political Leadership in 1920s America* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/luminos.62>.

possible.<sup>77</sup> Yet masculinity was never just about men. Barbara Spackman has brilliantly shown that women too could be ‘virile’ by dint of assuming the appropriate moral qualities, and Ruth Ben Ghiat has revealed the binding of masculinity and whiteness as mutually reinforcing signifiers of the health of the national body.<sup>78</sup>

Health is a key term in fascist rhetoric of self-validation. Spackman analyses in the closest of detail its multiple deployment in bolstering a figuration of the national body which was both reproductive (racial) and social (ideological): the idea was to produce more Italians and more Fascists. Yet, health as she demonstrates is underpinned by fantasies of violence enacted on both the individual and the collective body. Michael Ebner’s study of what he calls ‘ordinary violence,’ the quotidian and pragmatic assaults carried out by the regime on its citizens is informed by an understanding of Fascism’s belief in the formative and indeed transformative value of violence for the state’s project of national ‘bonifica’ or reclamation. His emphasis is on material acts of corporeal brutality: ‘Fascists and police, according to official sources, regularly “killed,” “beat,” “clubbed,” “punched,” “slapped,” “kicked,” “hit,” and otherwise used spontaneous “force” and “acts of violence” against citizens.’<sup>79</sup> The results, he observes, were equivocal. By the end of the ‘ventennio,’ ‘the masses certainly felt more “Italian” than they did in 1922, but they did not all necessarily think that this as a good thing.’<sup>80</sup> The intimation of dissent from the nation that Ebner picks up on suggests that Post-Unification disciplinary projects of nation building had alighted on resistant rather than compliant bodies.

Ben Ghiat’s work on ‘empire cinema’ tackles head-on Italy’s ongoing colonial ambitions and their cultural expression, and effectively delineates how the embodiment of ‘whiteness’ as a compendium of moral values rather than an epidermal descriptor came to define Italian identity. The often-repeated

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<sup>77</sup> Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man: Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012). John Champagne, *Queer Ventennio: Italian Fascism, Homoerotic Art, and the Nonmodern in the Modern* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2019).

<sup>78</sup> Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Chicago: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Ruth Ben Ghiat, *Italian Fascism’s Empire Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>79</sup> Michael R. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini’s Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ebner, *Ordinary Violence*, p. 20.

suggestion that Italy had repressed the memory of its colonial past implies too the repression of its multiple histories of racism and racialised thinking. These histories have begun to emerge in a series of important studies on migration to and out of Italy in which the corporeality of the migrant subject plays a foundational role. Jennifer Burns' work on narratives by recent migrants to Italy is informed by the idea that 'bodily presence and bodily experience form the interface between the interiority of the individual and the public, populated space.'<sup>81</sup> She draws on Sara Ahmed's theory of affect to reveal the body's status not simply as a cultural sign, but as the negotiated border between self and other, caught between circuits of expression and interpretation. While the migrant body is subject to the bureaucratic rigours of border control, it also generates affective senses of belonging and non-belonging. This gap is experienced by Giulia, the mixed race, binational protagonist of Shirin Ramzanali Fazel's novel *Nuvole sull'equatore*, when she first sets foot on Italian soil: 'Lei, italiana di pelle scura, non si sente per niente a casa sua.'<sup>82</sup> The sense of unhomeliness felt intimately by a 'dark-skinned Italian' bears the weight of Italy's specific relationship with its former colony of Somali and the legacy of mixed-race children left behind. While Giulia gradually 'makes' a home for herself in Rome by recognising elements of Mogadishu, Akli, the protagonist of a short story by Tahar Lamri effects a more radical dissociation between self and place: 'Io non ho paese. Il mio paese è il mio corpo. Il mio paese è dove sto bene.'<sup>83</sup> The 'Io corporeo' of Akli, an Algerian migrant to Sweden contrasts with that of Jean-Marie, a second-generation French-Algerian who longs for the 'home' his parents had turned their backs on. They meet in an airport, in transit, an apt metaphor for the indeterminacy and uncertain mobility of bodies and the vectors of power in which they are entangled.

Emma Bond's *Writing Migration through the Body* extends Burns' perception of the body as an expressive site of intersubjective negotiation and meaning.<sup>84</sup> Bond is interested in the narrativization of what she calls 'body

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<sup>81</sup> Jennifer Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries: Figures in Italian Migration Literature* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2013), p. 13.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, p. 63.

<sup>83</sup> Quoted in Burns, *Migrant Imaginaries*, p. 129.

<sup>84</sup> Emma Bond, *Writing Migration through the Body* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

journeys,' the ways in which the body itself is subject to transformation through practices of human and cultural mobility. The body becomes a 'dynamic archive' of often disregarded modalities of experience which also point to as yet unimagined futures. *Writing Migration through the Body* is a compelling index of how thinking about the sentient body has changed. Not just brute matter, nor a blank page passively awaiting social inscription, the body is a social actor, a trove of subjectivity and knowledge, malleable across time and space. Bond figures human corporeality through the concept of the 'trans-national,' whose hyphen recalls the ambiguity of the space and time of 'transit' intimated by Burns. 'Trans' as a signifier insists on the activity of being in-between, of being in the process of a crossing which may well represent its destination – there is no necessary or inevitable end point. Bond plays with the various meaning of 'trans' to explore the vicissitudes of embodied subjectivity in an era of mass human mobility. Her emphasis on the diversity of bodies and body parts, and the practices through which they come to generate meaning explodes the sometimes singular inflection of corporeal experience in earlier work. This diversity comes in no small measure from the variety of texts which comprises Bond's corpus and the pressure which they put on restrictive definitions of 'Italian' as a delimiting national-cultural signifier. Written (mostly) in Italian by non-Italians and detailing experiences in which Italy has no necessary part, these texts prise the body away from the imperious grip of the nation. Methodologically, Bond, like Burns, builds on Ahmed's work, as well as a wide range of post-phenomenological thinkers including the queer theorist Judith/Jack Halberstam whose work on 'trans' embodiment, in many ways, provides a template for Bond's more expansive elaboration. Yet what is also striking are the links between *Writing Migration through the Body* and earlier feminist work on the female body. Bond's chapter on 'Transnational Mothering' ends with a quote from Luce Irigaray; she also references Kristeva, and the voices of Adrienne Rich, and in a different vein, Elizabeth Grosz also return this highly innovative study to an earlier moment. Alberica Bazzoni's recent monograph on Gogliarda Sapienza similarly draws on the theoretical work of feminist thinkers such as Cavarero

and Irigaray as well as effecting a recuperative gesture towards the belatedly highly-regarded Sicilian author.<sup>85</sup>

Bond's book parallels what might be termed the corporeal turn in Italian film studies evincing a similar interest in movement, gender, and the social function of the body. Her brief reference to Bakhtin's notion of the 'grotesque' body as both a social safety valve and conduit of resistance finds more extensive elaboration in Alan O'Leary's foundational work on the popular 'cinepanettone' phenomenon.<sup>86</sup> O'Leary's exploration of a cinematic genre which does not travel outside Italy focuses on bodily excess as a technology for the comic investigation of beleaguered, national masculinity. Jacqueline Reich's study of the career and performances of Marcello Mastroianni also turns on the idea of national masculinity in crisis. His international commodification as a typically 'Latin lover' was at odds with many of his comic film roles often embodying the figure of the 'inetto,' as a complex sign of the nation's own compromised status in the post-war period.<sup>87</sup> Reich's later book on Maciste, the hero of a series of Italian silent films, indicates an even stronger albeit overdetermined connection between the male body and national identity. While Maciste's character remained the same as the series progressed, his body didn't:

In his passage from supporting character in *Cabiria* to the series' leading man, Maciste underwent several radical alterations: he moved from Ancient Rome to modern-day Italy, and he changed from a black-skinned African slave to a white northern Italian. His metamorphosis from African to Italian and from black to white solidified his status as national hero and a racially acceptable patriotic strongman. Classical ideals of masculine beauty – as they had come to be represented in Ancient Greek and Roman sculpture, Renaissance art, eighteenth-century neoclassicism, nineteenth-

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<sup>85</sup> Alberica Bazzoni, *Writing for Freedom: Body, Identity and Power in Gogliarda Sapienza's Narrative* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018).

<sup>86</sup> Alan O'Leary, *Fenomenologia del cinepanettone* (Soveria Mannelli, Rubettino, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> Jacqueline Reich, *Beyond the Latin Lover: Mastroianni, masculinity and Italian cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

century photography, and eventually film - informed these contemporary nationalist ideas of the male body.<sup>88</sup>

Catherine O'Rawe's magisterial *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema* echoes Reich's work in its capillary analysis of the sheer semiotic elasticity of the male form and its transformative properties.<sup>89</sup> O'Rawe starts from the proposition that white, male bodies are 'invisible' in that the lack of scrutiny to which they are subject is symptomatic of men's cultural and social dominance. Accompanying this invisibility, however, is the claim that masculinity itself is in (still) crisis, a trope that in its multiple articulations always makes the (mal)formations of the male body so resolutely about the nation. In recent cinema, the crisis has been figured through corporeal narratives of 'paternity, monogamy, the workplace, and ageing'.<sup>90</sup> O'Rawe's abiding, and somewhat contentious, point is that 'nearly all Italian cinema is male melodrama, shot through with regret for un-lived possibilities and dwelling lovingly in the space of homosocial crisis'.<sup>91</sup> Traditionally, melodrama has of course been seen as primarily a female genre, yet its availability as a vehicle for the expression of masculine affect translates the fluidity of gendered embodiment noted elsewhere into a different cultural key. Affect can be aural as well as visual and narrative, and in a critical gesture which brilliantly aligns the myriad configurations of trans embodiment identified by Bond, O'Rawe affirms the potential of Black American disco music to instantiate ideological critique of white masculinity. Commenting on the tendency of the television series *Romanzo criminale* to associate non-white characters with criminality and sexual deviance, she notes the use of disco as soundtrack to scenes of violence primarily to assert a link between 'non-whiteness and abjection and inferiority'.<sup>92</sup> Yet the pleasure and vertiginous incoherence generated in particular by Sylvester's 'You make me feel (Mighty Real)' through the star's own black queer embodiment, the claims of

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<sup>88</sup> Jacqueline Reich, *The Maciste films of Italian silent cinema* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>89</sup> Catherine O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities in Contemporary Italian Cinema* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

<sup>90</sup> O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, p. 4.

<sup>91</sup> O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, p. 165.

<sup>92</sup> O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, p. 105.

realness intimated by the song's title and the falsetto in which it is delivered, as well as the characters' contradictory responses to the music leads O'Rawe to conclude that the music 'can be understood to create or enable this space of contradiction.'<sup>93</sup> The imbrication of normative masculinity in anxieties about race, sexuality, and authenticity are made visible through performance yet left unresolved by the narrative.

### *Re-thinking Bodies*

I began this reflection on corporality by returning to an Honours course I devised some twenty years ago. Although I no longer teach 'Thinking Bodies', I realise that much of what lay behind it has been transposed into 'Black Italians,' a module which explores the racialisation of the Italian body from the Renaissance to the present day and draws on much of the outstanding recent scholarship which I've scanned. The 'Blackness' to which the title refers does not index solely those Italians of African descent, but encompasses all those whose bodies have been subject to a toxic logic of negative racialisation particularly since Unification when, as I have pointed out, the symbolic figuration of the Italian body became an object of national concern. One of the aims is to give historical depth to the sometimes overly narrow discussions of race and racism which have characterised responses to migration to Italy and to the ethnic, religious and linguistic diversification of what was always an artificially framed monoculture. D'Annunzio's novella 'La vergine Anna' portrays the ailing, female, southern body and offers an almost textbook instance of Lombrosian degeneration. Bassani's *Dietro la porta* similarly maps the pathologization of the male Jewish body in which body parts and moral characteristics suggest a vertiginously mobile racializing of Lacan's 'corps morcelé.' Makaping's incisive *Traiettorie di sguardi: e se gli altri foste voi* is a Black African woman's riposte to the quotidian tyrannies of Italian whiteness. One notable feature of these disparate texts is their documenting of the spectacular and defining violence done to bodies in the name of the nation.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> O'Rawe, *Stars and Masculinities*, p. 107.

<sup>94</sup> Two recent works which in different, yet complementary, way analyse this national violence through a global or transnational optic are Àine O'Healy, *Migrant Anxieties: Italian Cinema in a*

Over time, in my own thinking about corporeality, the work of Primo Levi has remained a constant. Levi's representation of the suffering body and its deliberate mortification tests the capacity of language to capture an 'Io corporeo' pushed beyond what would seem human limits. Levi also explores the boundaries between humanity and the animal world as well as limning the borders of matter and spirit. It is an exploration born of the experience of antisemitism and racism. Perhaps the most resonant, yet opaque instance of embodied subjectivity he charts is his determined retention of the tattoo imprinted on his arm in Auschwitz. Charlotte Ross in her study of embodiment in Levi's work draws on Didier Anzieu and his concept of the 'skin ego' to suggest how traces on the external body may also 'shape the idea of the self'.<sup>95</sup> Emma Bond also references Anzieu in her examination of Nicolai Lilin's much more recent account of the system of tattooing in the Siberian criminal underworld. Both the tattoo and the skin on which it is etched have a peculiar status: 'private and public, intimate and symbolic'.<sup>96</sup> Tattoos constitute an unexpected thread in this discussion. As a form of corporeal writing, they fascinated and repulsed Lombroso recalling the past as an atavistic practice embodied in a criminal infested present. For him, Stewart Steinberg contends, the tattoo's complex corporeal temporality was a 'double wound,' just as it did, albeit very differently for Levi.<sup>97</sup> In many respects then tattoos encapsulate much of my discussion on corporeality. Bodies are worldly things, but they are also private possessions. They circulate and make meaning, record histories of damage and pleasure. More than anything, they bespeak the compromised, precarious agency of human subjects.

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*Transnational Frame* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019) and Karl Schoonover, *Brutal Vision: The Neorealist Body in Postwar Italian Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012)

<sup>95</sup> Charlotte Ross, *Primo Levi's Narratives of Embodiment: Containing the Human* (New York and London: Routledge 2011), p. 70.

<sup>96</sup> Bond, *Writing Migration*, p. 36.

<sup>97</sup> Stewart Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect*, p. 261.