

**DRAFT**

## Introduction

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*This is my body.* *This*: right here, this carnality in and through which I know the world, for sensing and feeling across the gaps of flesh and world is also knowing. *Is*: yes, really, a collection of drives and desires is my body, for desire seeks incarnation, and no ontology is complete that ignores this truth. *My*: the body is mine and indeed is myself, for though I am other than myself, the self is fundamentally embodied even in its otherness. *Body*: perhaps the most puzzling word in this short phrase, for at times the body seems strikingly and painfully alien—and yet there is nothing so close to me as my body; it is ownmost.

*This is my body*: a declarative statement, an offer made to another (or received, or both), an expression of wonderment, even an implied question, for to name the body is to name a mystery. What, in truth, is this that we so often take for granted, to the point of assuming that it is negligible? What is this in and through which we exist in the world, yet which seems also to disrupt our relation to the world when it becomes the locus of suffering?

For contemporary philosophers of the body who wrestle with these questions, it is not a matter of trying, *à la* Descartes, to prove that the body exists. It is impossible to prove the body, not because its existence is doubtful, but because it is prior to proof. Seeking to prove what is right in front of one's nose may be foolish; seeking to prove one's nose is more foolish still and is the mark not of a properly cautious *cogito* but of severely disordered thought. We must instead listen to the body, to its pulsating drives and desires that, in their seeming chaos, challenge our very understanding of meaning and sense.

At the beginning of his seminars, Paul Ricœur would ask his students, “*D’où parlez-vous?* Where do you speak from?” When grappling with this question, we must remember that each of us speaks from a body and that the

body itself speaks. Language is not the product of a free-floating intellect but already takes place at the level of embodied desire. Indeed, the carnal language of touch is our first language, our first means of communicating with others and with the world. The infant, whose very name comes from the Latin *infans*, “without speech,” is in reality already speaking—though not in the manner Western philosophy has privileged—when she reaches out her arms to her parents or clutches the one holding her more tightly. Even the child in the womb, drawing nourishment from the mother, is already speaking the language of the flesh.

The body and its language are so fundamental that Descartes himself, even when he concluded that he could escape universal doubt only by taking the isolated *cogito* as the foundation of all knowledge, defined “[a] thinking thing” as “[a] thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines *and senses*.”<sup>1</sup> Doubting his body, he yet could not doubt that he was not only an intellect but was also a sensing being. Thus the body demands our attention even when we least expect it: in the midst of the meditations of one of the philosophers most notorious for disregarding our carnal existence, the body, via the senses, haunts Descartes’ analysis in a way we can recognize even if he could not. And yet we should hesitate to criticize too quickly the philosophers who emphasized the intellect at the expense of the body (the so-called “Platonist,” rationalist, and idealist traditions in particular), lest we falsely imagine that today, at last, we have fully fathomed the body and its significance. If that which is right in front of one’s nose is all too easy to miss, it is hardly surprising that studying our noses should prove a challenging endeavor.

Indeed, although in contemporary continental philosophy it has become something of a commonplace to blithely assert that Western metaphysics tends to separate the person from the body, we all too often stop there without deeply probing the complexities of corporeality and desire. The suggestion that the phenomenological tradition tends to neglect the experience of alienation from desire and the body remains a novel one. Phenomenology has, by and large, preserved a dichotomy between being at home and being alienated: thus either I am absolutely at home in my body or I am absolutely alienated from my body because it is not me at all, and the latter viewpoint is seen as an unfortunate hangover from Cartesianism. In reality, however, as the essays that compose this volume make clear, we are *both* at home in *and* alienated from embodied desire, and philosophers must grapple with both aspects of our existence in the world. Continental philosophers have already done much to challenge binary oppositions, and this volume sets out a new challenge: we must now also question the dichotomy between being at home and being alienated. Alterity is not simply something out there, separate from myself; rather, it penetrates me through and through, even in my corporeal experience. Philosophers have tended to recognize that we can be strangers



to ourselves without acknowledging that this observation extends even to our embodied life. *My body* is both my own and other; I am other than myself and therefore other than my body.

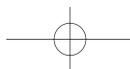
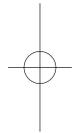
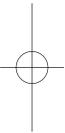
In short, our contributors all ask what it means for human beings to be embodied as desiring creatures—and, perhaps still more piercingly, what it means for a *philosopher* to be embodied. As they take up this challenge via phenomenology, psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of literature, they question the orthodoxies not only of Western metaphysics but even of the phenomenological tradition itself. We miss much that has philosophical import when we exclude the somatic aspects of human life, and it is therefore the philosopher's duty now to rediscover the meaning inherent in desire, emotion, and passion—without letting the biases of any tradition determine in advance the meaning that reveals itself in embodied desire.

We cannot, however, afford to neglect the rich resources that the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions already bring to bear on the questions of desire and the body. Our first section, “Somatic Desire: *Uncovering Corporeality in Phenomenology and Hermeneutics*,” presents critical readings and develops extensions of little-discussed aspects of valuable work in these traditions, with an especial but not exclusive focus on Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Ricœur.

Andrea Staiti's “Desire as the Individuation of Need: A Phenomenological Proposal in Dialogue with Barbaras and Husserl” seeks to redress the neglect of desire in phenomenology and shows that recently published works by Husserl provide an account of the relation between desire and individuality. Although Renaud Barbaras, the only recent phenomenologist to center desire in his work, explicates the crucial contrast between desire and need, it is Husserl who demonstrates that desire emerges from need when the subject in her embodied individuality is affected by the individual essence of an object. Thus phenomenology itself, from its very beginnings, has much to teach us about desire.

Brian Treanor's “Lateralization and Leaning: Somatic Desire as a Model for Supple Wisdom” places hermeneutics in dialogue with the work of Michel Serres in order to explore the embodied, desiring individual's relation to the surrounding environment. Treanor further develops carnal hermeneutics—an approach that was first introduced by Richard Kearney and Treanor himself<sup>2</sup> and that attends to the flesh as the medium by which we know the world—by showing that when we consider bodily experiences of nature, we are reminded that materiality and embodiment are not prisons but rather are our proper milieu. The body's ability to adapt to natural conditions even exemplifies the hermeneutic flexibility that we need if we are to avoid rigidity and decay.

Richard Kearney, like Treanor, furthers the project of carnal hermeneutics in his chapter, “The Recovery of the Flesh in Ricœur and Merleau-Ponty.”





Kearney shows that while neither Ricœur nor Merleau-Ponty has the full story—Ricœur needs a greater carnal element, Merleau-Ponty a greater textual one—reading them together enables carnal hermeneutics to discover the flesh as the locus in which radical, transcendent otherness is revealed. Far from isolating her in her ipseity, the individual's body opens her to the world and to others.

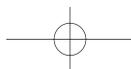
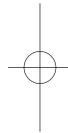
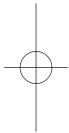
Responding to Kearney's arguments in "Ricœur on the Body: A Response to Richard Kearney," Gonçalo Marcelo shows that there are points in Ricœur's philosophy other than those Kearney favors that could be meaningful for carnal hermeneutics. Marcelo also proposes a fruitful pathway for future studies: a carnal hermeneutical reading of political movements and struggles for recognition. Desire and the body condition even our political life—as indeed they must if otherness is revealed in the flesh, however surprising the connection between politics and embodied desire might at first appear.

Continuing this exploration of how the sense of the body reveals itself in all facets of our lives, the second section, "The Body in Love and Sickness," probes two experiences that might seem quite different—erotic love and illness—but that in fact prove to be profoundly related.

"Embrace and Differentiation: A Phenomenology of Eros," a conversation between Emmanuel Falque and Richard Kearney, puts carnal hermeneutics into dialogue with Falque's exploration, via phenomenology, of experiences that would often be considered strictly theological—here, the Eucharist and marriage as sacrament. Discussing eros, agape, and the relation between them, he and Kearney wrestle with the questions of how fidelity is inscribed in the body itself and of what it means to sacralize the body.

In this conversation with Kearney, Falque briefly mentions his notion of the spread body (*le corps épandu*); now the following chapter, "Toward an Ethics of the Spread Body," presents it at length for the first time in English.<sup>3</sup> Falque shows that between the extended body of Descartes and the lived body of phenomenology (especially in the work of Husserl), the spread body is the body in pain and sickness, the body on the operating table, the organic body that does become an object for the one living in it. Exploring not only the sense of the body but also the non-sense of the body, Falque emphasizes both the terrible reality of pain and the stubborn, bodily desire for life that suffering and illness do not destroy. And he finds sanctity in the suffering body as in the body given to another in eros.

In "Dying to Desire: Soma, Sema, Sarx, and Sex," John Panteleimon Manoussakis emphasizes still further the relation between eros and sickness: the desiring body is precisely a sick body. Through an analysis of Socrates' desire (in the *Phaedrus*) for the scroll that is Phaedrus' symbolic body and (in the *Charmides*) for Charmides' body of flesh, Manoussakis shows that this desire to strip the body of its clothes to see the naked flesh becomes a





desire to strip off the body—becomes, ultimately, the desire of death, of *Thanatos*. Desire and death are indissociable, for desire is directed toward the body (*soma*) as grave (*sēma*).

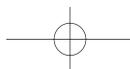
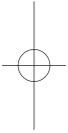
Manoussakis makes clear that myth and literature as well as philosophy testify to this intimate relation between death and desire, and the four authors in our concluding section, “The Inscribed Body: Text and the Afterlife of the Flesh,” all join literature and philosophy to examine further what the fundamental experiences of love, sexuality, alienation, and death reveal about embodied desire.

In “Anxiety, Melancholy, Shrapnel: Contribution to a Phenomenology of Desire,” Richard Rojcewicz turns to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to elucidate Heidegger’s notion of anxiety and Merleau-Ponty’s study of disrupted relations to the world (as exemplified in the case of Schn.). Hamlet’s melancholy, he argues, corresponds to Heidegger’s anxiety, and only desire, in the form of his love for Ophelia, brings Hamlet to action—or, in phenomenological terms, to an intentionality directed toward the world as world. In short, it is embodied desire that constitutes our world.

In “The Poetics of Lack and the Problem of Ground in Knut Hamsun’s *Hunger*,” Christopher Yates interrogates the constitution of our being-in-the-world with an eye to the self-deceptive tendencies lying at the heart of that being-in-the-world. Hamsun’s novel, about a young writer whom starvation leads to a desperate and unrelenting madness, asks why and how the dissolution of the autonomous self draws us into an abyssal experience of desire from which it seems that the only self-deception could save us. Hamsun, read with Heidegger and Schelling, shows us the dangers and illusions to which desire and the body fall prey as we seek to escape alienation.

Miguel de Beistegui’s “From the Writing of Desire to the Desire of Writing” reads Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time* to analyze the problems of alienation and unhappiness, and he concludes that desire cannot be conceived of as negative or as opposed to enjoyment. Writing, he proposes, becomes the movement through which the author’s self is dissolved and another, impersonal life forms. When the writer crosses that threshold, life reaches its highest expression, and this life’s desire is enjoyment itself; it is not merely desire with a view to enjoyment. It might appear that absence is necessarily negative, yet it is out of the absence of the lover, and ultimately of oneself, that true, positive enjoyment comes.

In the final chapter, “Miracle,” Alphonso Lingis, via a discussion of several of Jean Genet’s novels, also shows how that which is or seems to be negative—the brutish, the ugly, the repulsive—is also beautiful. For the miracle of love to occur, Genet must love even the corpse and the murderer of his beloved. The body, as hideous and disgusting as it can be, is not alien to desire, for desire arises and reaches its apogee in the midst of filth and horror. Isolating desire from the body—rejecting the body as unworthy, failing to





realize that what is unworthy must also and especially be loved—will only serve to drain love and desire of their force. And desire and the body have a way of escaping all the neat and proper confines into which we might wish we could fit them.

Precisely because embodied desire thus resists our confines and our categories, this book is a conversation, not a presentation of a new orthodoxy. It is thus our hope that these essays will open the way for further dialogue that will continue to radically rethink our understanding of embodied desire. Rather than falling, as it so often has in the past, into the trap of easy answers that oversimplify the human experience of the world, philosophers must remember that we are both at home in our bodies and desires *and* alienated from them at the same time. The desire to flee the body forgets that we are at home, yet the desire to be simply identical with one's body forgets that we are other than ourselves. Either is a form of self-deception. Desire may at times seem to struggle against embodiment, but it is necessarily embodied. Moreover, though at times both our bodies and our desires may appear opposed to our happiness, we and our world would be nothing without them—and, fortunately, enjoyment may be possible all the same.

## NOTES

1. René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 19. Translation modified. Emphasis added.

2. See *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

3. The spread body was first proposed in Emmanuel Falque, *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*, trans. George Hughes (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016), but it was not laid out in detail until “Toward an Ethics of the Spread Body.”

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