

Abstracts for "Writing New Histories of Embodiment"

SAA 2015

Dori Coblenz: Knowing Touches in *The Comedy of Error*

What kind of knowledge is produced through touch? What way of knowing is it to touch and be touched? Early modern scholarship has approached the epistemology of touch in a variety of promising ways, from Raphael Lyne's work on mirror neurons to Elizabeth Harvey's reading of the senses as "instruments of knowledge" in Lucretius and Canvendish. Attention has largely focused on cooperative models of touching and being touched, with intersubjectivity implicitly or explicitly linked to synergy. In contrast, I am interested in how adversarial and interruptive rhythms of words and bodies work to create effects across individuals and their environments. Using John Teske's observations on recent developments in cognitive science, I turn to scenes from *The Comedy of Errors* to analyze episodes of corrective, diagnostic, or violent touch. I look in particular to two moments in the play: an interaction between Pinch and Antipholus of Ephesus in which the medico-pedagogue attempts to take Antipholus's pulse, and a complaint from Dromio of Ephesus in which he likens himself to a football punted between his master and mistress. The former I see as a way in to the play's theory of knowledge, especially in how it relates to touch. The latter represents an adversarial model of intersubjectivity that plays out in the space between the characters. I aim to show that the ways in which the early modern theater conceptualizes intersubjective antagonism is a valuable supplement to current work focusing on empathy and cooperation in joint activities and their embodied knowledges.

Elizabeth Crachiolo: Herrick's Perceiving Vine: New Materialisms and Extended Cognition

Robert Herrick's "The Vine" presents a situation in which a plant is a more sensitive perceiver than a human. In this poem, the speaker dreams that his sexual organ "metamorphoses" into a vine that "crawls" over his lover's body. The vine enables a heightened sensitivity, with multiple "nervelets" exploring various body parts at once. The speaker finds his real body to be blunt, indelicate, and short on feeling compared to the exquisite sensitivity of his dream. I argue that new materialisms (via Diana Coole and Samantha Frost's anthology *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*) and extended cognition (via J.A. Teske's article "From Embodied to Extended Cognition") are useful in parsing out the implications of such extra-human ways of feeling: new materialism posits the agency of nonhuman matter and insinuates that too much focus has been placed on human subjectivity (or even subjectivity in general), while Teske suggests that subjectivity and perception might extend beyond discrete bodies. My paper addresses how we can use these approaches, both deeply invested in modern science, to understand a pre-Cartesian past. I assume that we can, in turn, use that past to apprehend or filter the new materialist present, with the past as a repository for possible alternative ways of thinking that Coole and Frost argue are needed today.

Lianne Habinek: Abstract

The peculiarity of the female mind-body connection fascinated writers from the Classical era through the early modern period, primarily manifesting itself in a philosophical fear of the potential power of the woman's mind upon both her body and those of her progeny. Margaret Cavendish's own philosophy develops, I suggest, a metaphorical link between the brain and the womb. These two entities were thought, in Aristotelian, Platonic, and Galenic traditions (albeit in distinct ways) to be generative organs with the capacity to bridge the gap between the physical and the immaterial. The brain was often depicted in anatomical renderings as similar to the interior of the womb; in addition, portions of the brain were named after male and female "reproductive organs." Writerly references to the metaphor of the womb for the brain regularly invoked womb-ish terminology: imagination "conceives" and "gestates" in the brain's ventricles; the author "births" the written work. The womb also had important metaphorical ties to physiological and psychological actions carried out in the brain: a mother's overactive imagination could misfire, producing a monstrosity directly related to the images in the ventricles of her brain. In considering the mind-womb connection through the lenses of both Cavendish's philosophy and embodied cognition, this paper will draw on John Teske's "From Extended to Embodied Cognition" and Savani et al.'s work on emotional residue to suggest that thought might occur in a non-thinking organ – that is, that the womb, along with the brain, constitutes "intelligent matter." Worries surrounding the power of the maternal imagination are rendered positive in Cavendish's brilliantly teeming mind and through her writings, yet her procreative cognitive force proved troubling to her contemporaries.

Allison P. Hobgood, SAA 2015 "Externalism, Intersubjectivity, and Mattering Reorientations"

Sarah Ahmed recently has argued that "orientations are about the direction we take that puts some things and not others in our reach" ("Orientations Matter" 245). In the spirit of our seminar topic, my essay explores the ways we face in the world and the possibility of profound reorientations: what happens cognitively, dramatically, philosophically, or ethically when we orient in new ways? Given that we are habituated into certain alignments, how do reorientations take shape, both literally and figuratively? I especially am interested in how cognitive (and other) reorientations happen through externalism and intersubjectivity, or what J. A. Teske describes as the mind being *not just* in the head ("From Embodied to Extended Cognition" 776). My essay reads Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, in particular the matter of rings, to examine how, if "thereness" and familiarity are about what goes unnoticed in our cognitive fields, an object—like a ring—that seems so familiar might be usefully, maybe even queerly, disorienting. In my paper, I play with the possibility that *Merchant's* rings are (dis)orienting external materials (perhaps even prostheses?) that extend and reshape the cognitive landscapes and embodied experiences of the characters that come into contact with them. In other words, Shakespearean rings are lively, familiar matter that produces some unfamiliar orientations. My examination of *Merchant* tackles some broader, related questions too: What matter matters in reconfiguring how we perceive and move through the world, and how do things suddenly appear on our horizons when, previously, they lay someplace just

beyond our lines of sight? How might proximate, intimate, vibrant things become productively unfamiliar, and how can the assemblages of energy, people, and matter in which we typically stay situated prompt us in radical, new directions?

Tiffany Hoffman: Empathy and the Problem of Other Minds in *Lucrece*

The issue this paper addresses is a classic one in the philosophy of mind known as the phenomenological “problem of other minds.” How are we able to know other people—their intentions, thoughts, beliefs, and mental processes? Early modern discourses such as humoralism and physiognomy afforded the early moderns an historically specific kind of “embodied consciousness” that would have made mindreading relatively easy. *The Rape of Lucrece* sustains a view of psychological materialism, both in relation to the self and the self’s understanding of others. At the same time, however, the poem departs from conventional forms of intersubjective knowledge by exploring empathy as an alternative mode of social understanding. Drawing on recent investigations in the neuroscience of empathy and the related “mirror neuron hypothesis,” this paper argues that *Lucrece* rejects the notion of a purely cognitive model of linguistic or narrative communication in favor of an embodied approach to epistemological truth founded on empathetic simulation.

At the root of this essay is the neuroscientific view that human consciousness is embodied and embedded in the environment. This connectionist relationship is well documented in *The Embodied Mind* (Varela, Thompson and Rosch); however, it receives new attention in Evan Thompson’s article “Empathy and Consciousness,” where it is explicitly linked to notions of social perception and cognition. Thompson ties the recent discovery of mirror neurons—which become activated when the subject observes an action, emotion, or sensation and then automatically reenacts it—to the work of Edmund Husserl, who described one’s empathetic experience of another as “an internal imitation of the movement accomplished by the other.” Such a theory presupposes that individuals can gain knowledge of other minds because they possess an inherent capacity to imitate another’s physical gestures, using their own mind as a model for reconstructing the mental processes underlying such behaviors (on this view see also the work of Karsten Steuber, Dan Zahavi, Vittorio Gallese, Alvin Goldman, David Freedberg, Shaun Gallagher).

The simulationist approach to empathy is particularly amenable to *Lucrece*, which espouses the view that social consciousness is embodied and, hence, predicated upon a dynamical action of reciprocal engagement between the bodies and minds of self and other. By affectively reconfiguring her body, Lucrece is able to more effectively convey the story of her inner purity and the inherent spotlessness of her mind, transforming social consciousness and moral perception of her through her mimetic capacity to move those around her physically and emotionally.

Bronnie Johnston: A Renaissance Frankenstein: Re-embodiment and Sentience in *The Devil is an Ass*

What does it feel like to inhabit the human body for the first time? In Ben Jonson’s 1616 play *The Devil is an Ass*, the demon Pug possesses a freshly-hanged cadaver to pass as human, becoming “subject to all impressions of the flesh.” While such re-embodiments are mentioned in several early modern playtexts, Jonson’s play is unique in depicting the experience of bodily possession from the devil’s point of view and showing the extent to which Pug’s “sense of sensation” comes to dictate his actions. This paper investigates how the devil responds to a sentient existence, examining how his newfound body influences and overwhelms his natural, bodiless motivations. The philosophy of sensation provides an intriguing framework for understanding Pug’s experience. Reading the play alongside Daniel

Heller- Roazen's analysis of Hoffmann's *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr* underlines just how much Pug is affected by his embodiment. Unlike Hoffmann's cat who marvels in the "sense of sensation," for Pug the experience is bewildering and unbearable. His newfound body both mutes and enhances his reactions and he has to renegotiate his thought processes as a result. Ultimately, Pug's newly-embodied mind cancels out his demonic existence.

Colleen Kennedy: "The Nose-Wise Renaissance: Serres and the Phenomenology of the Early Modern Literary and Olfactory Imagination"

Juliet famously asks her love, upon learning that he has the surname of her familial foes, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose/ By any other name would smell as sweet" (2.2.43-44). Michel Serres, in *The Five Senses :A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, disagrees: "The name of the rose has no fragrance" (190). In this brief paper, I will consider Serres' chapter "Tables," on the senses of smell and taste as well as the inadequacies of language, read against or beside some early modern conceptions of how to give a language (a "first tongue") to the sense of smell (a "second tongue") (Serres 152-157). For early modern thinkers, language is often one of the additional senses; therefore, language does not need to be read purely as the destruction of our sensuous experiences but can be read in communion with the early modern sensorium. And in the instance of this short essay, the "name of the rose" and the "scent of the rose" are not as distanced when read *analogously* through the *historical* phenomenological lens. I briefly recover the early modern olfactive lexicon (i.e. "the idea of the scent of the concept of rose") to assert that there is, or was, a poetics of smell that blurs the senses, but not just the expected mingled senses of taste and smell, but rather the intermingled senses of speech and smell.

Natasha Korda: "Treading the Boards: The Early Modern Stage Perceived through the Feet"

The epithet "treading the boards" has long been synonymous with the actor's art, suggesting the reliance of that art upon footwork and footskills. Yet studies of gesture have focused almost exclusively on "the Art of Manual Rhetorick" or chironomy, reflecting a broader tendency in Western culture to privilege hands over feet since classical antiquity. As Tim Ingold demonstrates, this triumph of the hands over the heels has become "deeply embedded in the structures of public life" and "mainstream thinking in the disciplines." Its influence may be seen not only in theatre history, but in the study of material culture, which seeks to put us in touch with the past, while defining this "touch" in exclusively manual terms through its focus on the artisanal skill manifested in the crafted object. Ingold's work challenges us to consider the slow and uneven historical processes through which "the arts of footwork" came to be subordinated to those of handwork by studying everything from the history of bodily posture and gesture (including foot-etiquette) to changes in modes of transportation, structures of the built environment, and new technologies of footwear as they "mediate a historical engagement of the human

organism, in its entirety, with the world around it”—including the engagement of the actor (and audience) with the stage.

What might the Shakespearean stage look like if viewed from the perspective of the feet? We would do well to recall that this was the vantage from which the majority of early modern theatregoers would have watched the “two hour’s traffic” of plays unfold on the raised platform of the thrust stage. What forms did actors’ foot-traffic take? What kinds of foot-skills did the actor’s craft require? How were meaning, character, and emotion conveyed in and through motion from head to toe, or rather, from the ground up? What sorts of reciprocal or responsive (e)motion did actors’ footwork prompt in playgoers? How were plays paced, quite literally, through the feet? How did the tempos and rhythms generated by actors’ feet resonate with the metrical feet of verse drama? And how was movement onstage and off variously enabled, enhanced or impeded by changing technologies of footwear? This essay traces the footsteps of players and playgoers through play-texts, theatrical documents, and material artifacts (including the worn shoes found at the Rose), in an effort to attend to the bodies-in-motion that defined early modern theatrical experience as propelled and perceived through the feet.

Jesse M. Lander, "Hamlet’s Hair: Embodied Cognition and Historicism"

My paper begins with a brief consideration of the problem of horripilation in *Hamlet*. I suggest that hair standing on end raises important questions about affect, embodied cognition, and the supernatural, before turning to a consideration of John A. Teske’s “From Embodied to Extended Cognition,” *Zygon* 48 (2013): 759-87. I argue that Teske’s essay presents an ambiguous account of history that has a problematic relationship to the category of religion. The major claim for the congruence of recent cognitive science and theology regarding personhood presents history as a familiar force for progress in which truth is the daughter of time. However, Teske provides an alternative understanding history in his treatment of extended cognition. This approach, which sees the mind as tied to and, in part, constituted by physical, cultural, and social contexts is congruent with a form of historicism that aims to recover the rich specificity of particular historical situations.

Jillian Linster:

In *The Five Senses*, Michel Serres’s unwillingness to separate the senses from one another, his refusal to hierarchize them, and his insistence that their interrelatedness creates sensational experience not otherwise accounted for all echo early modern writing on the body. When viewed through Serres’s philosophy of mingled bodies, the physical artifact of the book provides a compelling way to reimagine the phenomenological experience of self-identity and social existence in early modern England. Serres’s philosophy is fluid and frequently ambiguous, often frustratingly so. But the turn to the material text enabled by that ambiguity makes productive use of an implicit difficulty to enrich and broaden the study of embodiment. In this paper I depend on Serres’s philosophy of the senses to examine precisely where and how bodily intimacy is constructed in one of John Donne’s love poems; the intimacy of books and human bodies

in Donne's lyric poetry epitomizes the intimacy of the senses in Serres's philosophy. In "The Ecstasy" Donne uses the book as a way to overcome the corporeal limitations of the body through the sensible engagement of a form that is both as material as a human being and as capable of metaphysical conceits, a way to mingle bodies through a calculated portrayal of human perception "that so / Weak men on love reveal'd may look."

Joan Pong Linton: "When the sensible becomes sociable: Reading *The Five Senses* through *The Winter's Tale*"

Memory is the silent partner to the sensible in Michel Serres's *The Five Senses*: so much of his celebration of the senses comes through accounts of personal memory, his own and those of others. Despite his claims that language renders one forgetful of the life of the senses, and that language in the medium of writing destroys memory, Serres allows that body memory can break through the veil of language, as when "individual ecstasy leaves an imperishable memory" (323), and even privileges those uses of language that enable or gesture toward the process. I would suggest that the insights Serres hones for the senses can be extended to remembering and making new memories, and I plan to do so by putting Serres in conversation with Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a play which so pointedly enacts diverse operations of memory, individual and collective, as part of not just the unfolding plot but also theater's embodied production involving actors, audiences, stage properties and environments. The body often comes across as asocial *The Five Senses*, paradoxically, through Serres' focus on the senses and on the power of words and speech to anesthetize the body and turn it to statue. In contrast, focalizing through memory, *The Winter's Tale* reveals the body to be inherently social. In attending to memory-making as a collective act, the play explores intercorporeal exchanges through which characters re-cognize their shared pasts and re-make their futures. Since the import of such exchanges lives only in the eye of the beholder, the play can be said to test the limits of representation on stage, especially in the recognition event (here involving Perdita's identity) so often seen as the defining moment in a play. Not directly staged, the reported event opens the intercorporeal field to the audience (the party most in the know about Perdita's identity), engaging its memory in the recognition process, and doing so through the agency in words and speech to move emotions and energize bodies in action. Such coproduction makes for a theater experience, sensed but unrepresentable, that taps the aesthetic potential in all parties, on stage and off, to remake themselves, each other, and their world. This intercorporeal dynamic constitutes the topology of Shakespearean romance, reported in "a world ransom'd" from "a world destroy'd," epitomized in the final staging of a statue coming to life. This theater beyond representation is the coproduced embodied "wonder" that validates theater as recreation in the full sense of the word. *The Winter's Tale* thus proves Shakespeare's theater to be deeply hospitable to Serre's aesthetic of mingled bodies.

Katey Roden: Embodying Cognition in the Sacramental Body: Reading Richard Crashaw Wrong, to Read Him Right

This paper examines how Social and Embodied Cognition theories provide a useful new lens to consider the sacramental vision at the heart of Richard Crashaw's devotional verse. Through a close reading of "The Flaming Heart," this paper demonstrates that

Crashaw's oft-critiqued blending of bodies and genders encourages readers to become conscious of their own "somatic marking" and thus initiate the kenotic process that ties our experience of consciousness to the bodily sensation generated through encountering a divine Other. The result of this newfound consciousness is an ideal reader who comes into being through the triangulated relation between Crashaw's subject-speaker, his devotional subject Saint Teresa, and himself. Through Crashaw's concerted attention to *how* his poem ought to be read, and his explicit direction to read according to his rule, Crashaw fashions an ideal reader capable of employing both the grammatical literacy required to read his verse and also the liturgical literacy needed to generate and maintain the devotional affect necessary to transpose his verse from mortal words to divine Word. Crashaw thus encourages a potentially surprising view of the cognition required to practice grammatical literacy in that his ideal reader can neither separate the body from the mind nor thoughts from feelings. Ultimately, then, Crashaw constructs an architecture of loving intersubjectivity wherein his speaker and his reader can only become conscious of selfhood through their relation to each other, the divine Other, and the ecstatic otherness of Teresa's flaming heart.

Brandie Siegfried: "Pinching William: Margaret Cavendish and Embodied Cognition"

In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, 1666), Margaret Cavendish asserts the uselessness of pretending (as she thinks the rationalists and Platonists do) that "an incorporeal mind" (*Observations* 40) is required for (1) comprehending the essential character of Nature, (2) understanding the mental and emotional states of another, or (3) having a soul. For Cavendish, the soul is material, matter is inherently relational, and no relations (even at the atomic level) are without matter's "self-knowing" and "self-moving" capacities at play – atoms don't merely bang into each other, accidentally creating energies and forms through unintended frictions. Rather, Cavendish insists, matter has intelligence, intention, and purpose. Granting those capacities to even the tiniest and seemingly least significant material forms leads Cavendish to wonder about perception's role in our orientation toward (or through) the world. This paper explores Cavendish's use of "fancy" as a mode of coherence between "rational motions" on the one hand, and "sensitive motions" on the other. That is, I discuss Cavendish's theory of how the body functions as an anchor *to* reality, even as it may be the creator *of* reality.

Maggie Simon: Bodies and Texts in George Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F.J.*

Using contemporary theories of embodied cognition and the period practice of ethopoeia, this paper argues that George Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F.J.* (1573) uses characters' bodies and material texts (letters, poems) to produce different types of interpersonal knowledge which activate different positions of rhetorical and embodied empathy. The narrative situation of *The Adventures of Master F.J.* relies on a version of ethopoeia: the narrator, G.T., voices and retells F.J.'s story to cultivate empathy. This rhetorical relationship between narrator and subject parallels F.J.'s bodily encounters with his illicit lover, Elinor. The rhetorical, and indeed editorial, encounters between G.T. and F.J. finally supersede the physical encounters between the lovers, structuring a narrative uncertain about the body as reliable affective sign and conduit for social knowledge. Gascoigne's text nonetheless is at pains to reveal G.T.'s editorial

insufficiencies, effectively criticizing the narrator's privileging of literary circulation and collaboration over embodied encounter.

Lizzie Swann: "Nosce Teipsum: Early Modern Senses of Self-Knowledge"

This paper takes Michel Serres' theorization of the relationship between body and soul as a starting point for a broader examination of early modern subjectivity and self-knowledge, whilst simultaneously challenging the opposition that Serres establishes between language and physicality. Ranging across the works of authors including John Donne, Sir John Davies, and Helkiah Crooke, I argue that early modern subjectivity had its roots in a form of self-reflexivity that was at once sensory and linguistic. Emphasising the role of epistemology, as well as affect, in the formation of identity, I propose that for writers such as Davies the resources of poetry functioned as a productive form of self-estrangement that could ultimately – and paradoxically – inculcate self-knowledge.

Whitney Blair Taylor : "The Imagination of the Winds" and Embodiment in Early Modern Poetry

In *The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine*, Shigehisa Kuriyama argues that discourses of the winds reveal historical conceptions of the body's embeddedness in the world. The "imagination of the winds," he demonstrates, frames how cultures experienced and negotiated questions of relatedness and autonomy, space and time, and continuity and change. This paper contends that the "imagination of the winds" points to lyric poetry, which is suffused with language of inspiration, air and breath, as fertile ground for exploring embodiment and relationality in the early modern period. Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* provides a case study for how figures of wind and breath might fashion a "poetic ecosystem" predicated on circulation and exchange between bodies and their environment. In the context of Kuriyama's work, Astrophil's invocations of breath and wind are not the airy conceits of unrequited love, but theorizations of the ways embodied selves are affected by their environment, poetic expression, and other "breathers" in that environment. The sequence reflects how poets trade on physiological premises of the body's openness to air to negotiate seemingly ethereal exchanges internal and external to the scene of poetic composition, e.g., exchanges between a poet and muse, lover and beloved, or the material text and reader. The dynamics of circulating breath and wind in *Astrophil and Stella* represent, in miniature, a poetic ecosystem in which an "imagination of the winds" mediates and animates exchange across the larger ecosystem of early modern poetic production.

Lauren Weindling: Permeable Material and Vibrant Blood

This paper finds in Golding's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1567) an early modern analogue of Jane Bennett's "vibrant matter." Ovid's etiological epic destabilizes and blurs the supposed boundaries between human, animal, and mineral, all of which are vital and have a measure of agency. This paper then examines Book I's descriptions of creation, focusing specifically on the men created from blood, in order to open up a reading of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In this play, blood purportedly dictates familial enmity, having agency beyond or outside of human control. And yet, the

blood of this play has power only insofar as human subjects, the characters, have bestowed it, and the results of this endowment are violent and tragic.