



Being-in-Danger: Being, Precarity, and Potential – Theoretical Speculations on the Palimpsestic Naked Body

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Abstract

This article provides speculative theorization on the relationship between concepts of ‘nakedness’ and the human body. It focuses on the theoretical value of the palimpsest as a symbol through which to parse the various ways that the human body can be marked, inscribed, read and reread. In so doing, this article attempts to speculate on the manner in which being, in relation to onto-existential precarity and danger, is fluid, mutable, alterable, as well as some theoretical consequences thereof. It opens by describing the theoretical significance of the palimpsest before moving on to speculating on its relationship to the onto-existential ‘nudity’ of embodied being. It closes with some further speculations on whether or not the precarity of embodied being subtends forms of being that do not require embodiedness in order to be.

Keywords

Palimpsest; Naked; Body; Metaphysics; Markability



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В опасности: Бытие, неопределенность и потенциал – теоретические размышления о палимпсесте обнаженного тела

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Аннотация

Статья представляет собой теоретические рассуждения об отношениях между понятиями «нагота» и «человеческое тело». В ней анализируется значимость палимпсеста как символа, с помощью которого можно рассмотреть различные способы маркировки, описания, прочтения и переосмысления голого / нагого тела. В статье предпринимаются шаги к осмыслению того, каким образом бытие, в связи с онто-экзистенциальной неопределенностью и опасностью, является изменчивым, трансформирующимся, непостоянным, и некоторых теоретических выводов этого. В начале статьи описывается теоретическое значение феномена палимпсеста, после чего автор переходит к рассуждениям о его связи с онто-экзистенциальной «наготой» телесного бытия. В заключении высказывается предположение о том, является или нет эта неопределенность субститутом форм бытия, которые не требуют телесности для своего существования.

Ключевые слова

палимпсест; нагота; тело; метафизика; маркировка



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“Thus I clothe my naked villainy with old odd ends, stolen forth of holy writ, and seem a saint
when most I play the devil.”

- **William Shakespeare, *Richard III***

Stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity. Obscenity is our name for the uneasiness which upsets the physical state associated with self-possession, with the possession of a recognised and stable individuality. Through the activity of organs in a flow of coalescence and renewal, like the ebb and flow of waves surging into one another, the self is dispossessed, and so completely that most creatures in a state of nakedness, for nakedness is symbolic of this dispossession and heralds it, will hide; particularly if the erotic act follows, consummating it.

- **Bataille, Georges. *Death and Sensuality*. 1957.**

“I know your generation relied on flowers and father’s permission,
but it’s 2019, and unless you’re Amish, nudes are the currency of love.
So stop shaming us.”

- **Rue Bennett, *Euphoria***

-Antony: Queens. Queens. Strip them naked
as any other woman, they are no longer queens.

-Rufio: It is also difficult to tell the rank of a naked general.
Generals without armies are naked indeed.

- **Mark Antony and Rufio, *Cleopatra***

And he said to him, “I heard thy voice as thou walkedst in the garden,
and I feared because I was naked and I hid myself.”

And God said to him, Who told thee that thou wast naked?

- **Genesis 3:10-11**

Tony Stark: I see a suit of armor around the world.

Bruce Banner: Sounds like a cold world, Tony.

Tony Stark: I’ve seen colder. This one, this very vulnerable blue one

- **Avengers: Age of Ultron**

“The Body is a Message of the Universe”

- **Shiho Yabuki (矢吹紫帆)**

I. On ‘The Palimpsestic Naked Body’: Towards a Speculative Definition

Aside from begging your indulgence in asking you to hold in your mind the epigrams above as you read, I will open by hazarding a guess: the phrase ‘the palimpsestic naked body’ may be incomprehensible to many. So, let’s open by breaking this phrase down into its constitutive parts - ‘palimpsestic’ and ‘naked body’ - and consider how they relate, as well as what theoretical consequences result from this association.



The Oxford Dictionary defines ‘palimpsest’ as a noun; a piece of writing material on which later writing can be superimposed on effaced earlier writing. Moreover, it can be understood as a reusable object that can be altered while still bearing a visible trace of its earlier form (Oxford Dictionary, 1989). This definition is in keeping with the way scholars have invoked the term. For example, Martin Daughtry (2014) describes palimpsests as follows:

inscribed sheets of vellum or other types of parchment that were reinscribed after the original writing had been erased. In the early medieval period, the original text was washed away with a mixture of milk and oat bran or scraped clean by medieval scribes using pumice dust. (Daughtry, 2014)

According to Encyclopedia Britannica Online (2010), another possible motive for palimpsestic writing in the ascendancy of Christianity in Europe “may have been directed by the desire of Church officials to ‘convert’ pagan Greek script by overlaying it with the word of God” (Encyclopedia Britannica Online 2010). I’d like to emphasize certain terms in the above definitions that are relevant to my speculations about the palimpsestic naked body to follow: *writing, material, superimposed, effaced, earlier, reusable object, altered, bearing, visible trace, form*. Taken together, these terms evoke notions of mark-making, carriage, reification, erasure, temporality, and mutability. Here, we can begin to conceptualize the palimpsest as being governed by a bivalent process of continual accrual and attrition.

With a serviceable definition of the palimpsest in place, I’d like for us to consider more broadly, and more theoretically, the possible *significance* mark-making, carriage, reification, erasure, temporality, and mutability have in relation to the onto-existential reality of the palimpsest and the naked body. To begin with, let’s go back to Daughtry, who offers a perspicacious overview of the sociopolitical and sociocultural implications of the concept, object, and practice of palimpsests/the palimpsestic:

Over the centuries, as the result of oxidation and other natural processes, the original texts often began to reappear beneath the newer writing. This fact made it possible for scholars of the palimpsest to engage in a kind of textual archaeology: ignoring the most recent layer, they peered back into the past, straining to read the words that had been effectively buried. In Latin these faint textual ghosts were called the *scriptio inferior* (underwriting) or *scriptio anterior* (former writing). The palimpsest is thus the result of successive acts of partial erasure and inscription, acts that turn it into a “multilayered record,” (Oxford English Dictionary) a trace of multiple histories and multiple authors. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, along with the development of new chemical techniques for uncovering the *scriptio inferior* and the widely publicized recovery of a number of historically important “lost” texts (McDonagh 1987, 210), the palimpsest emerged as a rich, interdisciplinary metaphor for the fundamentally interconnected, multiply situated, discursive nature of human experience. The acts of partial erasure and writing-upon-writing that the palimpsest presumes have inspired a vast tropology revolving around themes of temporality, memory, intertextuality, and power. For English author Thomas De Quincey (1845), the palimpsest was a textual model of human consciousness, which he imagined as a multilayered neural archive of experiences.



(“Such a palimpsest is my brain; such a palimpsest, O reader! is yours.”) For Freud (1925), the palimpsest, or at least its structural equivalent, provides a model for the mechanism of memory, and the relationship between conscious perception and the unconscious. For Russian poet Anna Akhmatova (1941–66), the author of this essay’s epigraph, the palimpsest represents the anxiety and intimacy of poetic influence. For Andreas Huyssen (2003), architectural palimpsests—the visible residue of buildings that have since been razed—provide a theoretical model for reading urban spaces intertextually and recovering “present pasts” from the abyss of cultural amnesia. (Daughtry, 2014)

I have quoted Daughtry at length because he, *in summa*, provides a clear account of the manner in which we here understand the palimpsest in relation to the naked body. We chose to retain this term because we agreed amongst ourselves that ‘palimpsest’ perfectly reflects the complexity and diversity of the phenomenon of objects that, simultaneously and paradoxically, both remain unchanged, and in other ways, turn into completely new objects under forces and acts that ultimately engender the accrual and attrition of Information. In view of this strange, fascinating (meta)morphology, this (meta)materiality, we understand a palimpsest as something that is transformed, something that is always-Also becoming something else through what Whitehead might call events, data transfer, (re)integrations, and (re)patterning (Seibt, 2022).

The onto-existential reality of the palimpsest, or indeed palimpsestic objects, could be defined as being-written-*anew*; what it was in the past is not what it is now, nor what it is becoming, that is will be, in the future, despite ostensible similarities it bears (bares) to itself at any of these ‘stages,’ which themselves are constantly changing. The old signs are removed/re-tooled/re-written, and new Information is (re)applied to the object. The naked body, therefore, is a *metatext* that can both speak and be spoken for in terms of the trace-narrative(s) inscribed on it, that indeed exist *through* it.

For us, the first palimpsest is the naked body, which includes all the palimpsestic features it houses – from the septennial palimpsesticism of the body in terms of Frisenian conceptualizations of cell renewal, to the phenomenological issues and debates of human memory. However, the palimpsesticism of the body also moves beyond its onto-existential reality to be expressed in metaphors that we use to describe it or name it. The body-as-a-text is always an agglomeration of polysemic Information that may and indeed is always-Already being interpreted, rewritten, etc. In this way, the ‘palimpsestic naked body’ refers to the idea that the body can, like Susan Bordo proposed, be inscribed and reinscribed with various ideologies, subject positions, traumas, and momentary emancipations. Therefore, by “palimpsestic”, we tried to emphasize not so much inscriptions on/over the body themselves, but rather how the naked body and the stylus – whatever the phenomena, force, actant, or agency that is doing the inscribing – interact.

Bordo (2003) discusses the body in its relation to its susceptibility to ideological forces. These forces manifest on and through the human body, and this line of



thinking is indebted to Louis Althusser's discussion of R/ISAs and the nature of Ideology developed in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Towards An Investigation" (1970); as well as Foucault's discussion regarding the carceral, biopowered control of the body by the State and its apparatuses in *Discipline and Punish* (1975). For Bordo, the human body is a medium of culture and as such, it is "powerful symbolic form, a surface on which the central rules, hierarchies, and even metaphysical commitments of culture are inscribed and..reinforced through the concrete language of the body" (Bordo, 2003, p. 2240). When related to our presiding theme, the space of the human body can be understood as an ideological palimpsest whereupon the codes and schematics of an individual's social and political life – from as banal as eating, dressing, and defecating, to as 'grandiose' as healing or killing – can be seen/interpreted.

One might argue that from this perspective, the body is largely a passive space, a space that can be read only as a metaphor or text of and for culture that is also simultaneously "a practical, direct locus of social control" (Bordo, p. 2240). However, the most important type of Information retained by a body in a sociopolitical sense is the perceived value (socioeconomic) of that body. Within capitalist realism, individual agency and individual Will are subordinate to the circuitous presence and control of ideology. This means that the body is not an engine of a type of power/agency that does not essentially refer to anything else in order to substantiate its being, but is, rather, a space where all manifestations and understandings of power are habitualized, ritualized, institutionalized and made praxis through said body. Biopower thus arrogates being so that the aptitude of the human body's creative or destructive energy can only manifest *through* technologies of biopower, such as ideology, through and upon the body which then subsequently affect other bodies in turn. The result of this process of biopowered inscription, imprinting, internalization, reproduction, and expression in and through the body is biopower itself being "made body", made real or tangible (Bordo, p. 2240).

In a variety of cultures and epochs, freedom is a common associative result and expression of numerous considerations of nudity. However, the ideological 'markability' of the body presents a danger to the individual seeking to liberate their own body from the omnipresent forces of biopower, tools of ideology, and reclaim the creative energy or force of the body. This is because "our conscious politics, social commitments, strivings for change may be undermined and betrayed by the life of our bodies – not the craving, instinctual body imagined by [Nietzsche or Freud, for example] but what Foucault calls the 'docile body,' regulated by the norms of cultural life" (Bordo, p. 2240). Biopower makes the task of assigning blame impossible for feelings of powerlessness, as oppressors, the oppressed, victims, and villains all merge into one homogenous mass operating under the term "subject" that in a way describes and determines the body politics of the 'body politic'. When it comes to Ideology and the body in Bordo's terms,



we must first abandon the idea of power as something possessed by one group and leveled against another; we must instead think of the network of practices, institutions, and technologies that sustain positions of dominance and subordination in a particular domain. (Bordo, p. 2242)

What is interesting about Judith Butler and Bordo's respective feminist approaches to the concept of power is the manner in which the body becomes *evidence* of power, if only passively. Butler writes that the “constancy of cultural inscription” which acts upon the body, is a power that signs itself on the body and on the body's being (Butler, 2001, p. 2543). Its value becomes synonymous with the presence, perception, and existence of the body as it has been perceived, inscribed, and existed heretofore. I acknowledge that, however remote or far-fetched it may seem, there is a possible future in which perceptions and understandings of “body” may be radically different, perhaps even unrecognizable within current frames of reference. For now, however, it appears that if there is a human body, everything that that body does is a manifestation not of power in an individual sense, an emanation of free will, but rather the body becomes a sign of subjection to an external, sempiternal power – a palimpsest that is measured and understood in terms of its subjection as both ideologically inscribed and inscribable. Therefore, the ontic condition of the body and its being is as a sign of subjection to power and the ontic condition of power is reified, embodied in its subjectivization in and through its subjects, namely human beings and their bodies.

On the one hand, this perspective is radically negative in that the materiality of the body can only signify and, subsequently accrue any form of value, as a subjected thing. On the other hand, this perspective recognizes the inextricability between power and the body. This assertion assumes that the space of the body must pre-exist in order for it to be inscribed. One cannot write on the air, and much in the same way, biopower can only manifest itself on and through bodies. Therefore, the body is a medium of power in that the body is capable of assuming power as well as being subsumed by it. This means that power emerges “as a result of an inscription on the body, understood as a medium, indeed, a blank page; in order for this inscription to signify, however, that medium must itself be destroyed – that is, fully transvalued into a sublimated domain of [externally determined] values” (Butler, p. 2543). History therefore becomes a “relentless writing machine” with Time as its invisible ink that writes upon the body, its medium “which must be destroyed in order for “culture” to emerge”, to signify, to be (Butler, p. 2543). That which is destroyed in the exchange between power and the body, the cost of this inter-relation, is agency, or the aptitude of the material of the body to create beyond itself, to become other to itself.

In theorizing the palimpsesticism of the body, we could also refer to Derrida and think of the palimpsestic naked body as a type of onto-existential etchersketch. In *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), Derrida inadvertently sums up our position as follows:



When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence. Whether we are concerned with the verbal or the written sign, with the monetary sign, or with electoral delegation and political representation, the circulation of signs defers the moment in which we can encounter the thing itself make it ours, consume or expend it, touch it, see it, intuit its presence. (Derrida 1982, p. 5)

When parsed through the idea of the palimpsestic naked body, the only thing truly *naked* about the palimpsestic body is the pseudo-exposed presence of previous traces that have marked it. Both the body and its markings are always-already referential. They are never what they ostensibly represent within themselves. They are always themselves within/through/by/against others. Both the body and its palimpsestic traces are therefore a type of *trace* of presence. Derrida's (1973) concept of *différance* is helpful in thinking about the complex interaction between notions of presence, absence, and the traces that mediate both. For Derrida, one of the primary consequences of *différance* is the paradox of present non-presence. *Différance* never asserts itself as present because it does not exist, nor does it belong to being present in any way, because it does not properly belong to a category of being, but rather describes the vacuity at the heart of all being (Derrida, 1973, p. 154). In this way, Derridean *différance* ultimately describes a play of traces: "It is a trace that no longer belongs to the horizon of Being but one whose sense of Being is borne and bound by this play; it is a play of traces or *différance* that has no sense and is not, a play that does not belong" (Derrida, p. 154). Even as a trace of being present, the trace must necessarily, and paradoxically, present itself; that is, "even as the trace presents itself, it does not present itself as such but rather presents and effaces itself at once" (Olson, 2011, p. 251). Both the body and its markings conform to this conception of present absence and absent presence. In being what is ultimately a shape-shifting entity or force, the discreet arrangement of the naked body is not singularly referential. What the palimpsestic body is is always-already a question of what it *was*, what *did* it look like, *when* did it appear as such and so on between the antipodes of birth and death.

The genealogy of marks inscribed upon the palimpsestic naked body describes a retrospective gaze into the past along a string of indeterminate traces, neither of which defines in any concrete sense, what it is. In this way the appearance of the body, in whatever form, locale, or time, is a trace of another appearance in another form, locale and time. Therefore, the palimpsestic body's seeming presence is always self-effacing. Its appearance and indeed 'existence' is always-already a non-presence, a deferred presence, a trace. As an amalgam of this kind, the palimpsestic body does not refer to any discrete time, place, sensation, aesthetic, or feeling, but a *melange*, a *bricolage* of various ideas, affective states, fantasies, aesthetics, and desires. In this way, being as necessarily being-in-danger means that existence is, in some way or other, permeated with an ambient horror; namely, the horror of the inescapability of partial presence, and the inescapability of



being – in its state of crisis – as always-already tending toward self-effacement. This is what is also suggested in the idea of the palimpsestic naked body: both the reality of the precarious encroachment and erasure of our comforting fantasies of present-presence, and the perceived safety of the remove and containment of the past or the space of embodied being as inviolable. In this way, ‘co-constitutive embodied precarity’ could be read as a descriptor of human civilization itself whereby the nudity of the onto-existential Reality thereof is deferred in multitudinous ways. But even this act of deferral is inscriptive, its displacement is a placement, its (de)marcation is a trace on a trace of marks, all hosted by the body.

Throughout the histories of cultures situated in both the Global North and the Global South, the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, sociocultural, and socio-ecological value of the naked body has undergone a variety of radical shifts on the one hand, and seemingly no change at all on the other. These debates have orbited the gyre of feelings, beliefs, and practices that encircle the embodied reality of the naked body. In a variety of epochs and milennia, this object, this embodied space, has come to represent and, indeed in some cases misrepresent, a multitude of ideas, desires, fears. The naked body has been regarded as an abject and marginal space, whereby the nudity of the body is seen as vestigial, anachronistic, outside of the refined closures of civilization that are figuratively clothed in the modesty of moral rectitude. The naked body has also been regarded as an excrescent lure whose animal magnetism, to re-territorialize a term of Franz Mesmer’s, potentiates unlawful desires and displays.

In some instances, the naked body as emblematic of the embodied reality of bare life, to borrow a phrase from Giorgio Agamben, ruptured repressive attitudes and practices. Here, the naked body broke through and overcame legal and cultural barriers concerning the permissibility of the unadorned, naked, bare reality of embodied experience that have attempted to mark and re-make the body in some form or other for centuries. To some, this is a privilege resulting from a long and attritional moral and economic battle. For others, the liberation and revaluation of the naked body, interpreted in myriad ways both literal and figurative, stands as extreme surety of the retrogression of civilization. Despite these differences in attitude and approach to the naked body, in digital capitalism, the naked body continues to reify a range of perceptions and understandings which themselves are indices of the relationship bodies have with the societies in which they take their Being.

It is this point of the ‘markability’ of the body and its ability to mark that yields interesting insights into the nature of not only bodily perception, but the perceptions and feelings we have toward naked bodies as well. As we have stated in the CFP for this issue, in terms of the phenomena of (inter)body markability, it would be accurate to think of this phenomena in terms of the body not only being a marker, but also the body as being a whole set of markers: an embodied productive archive of ideological indices. Like a palimpsest, it can be written upon, be marked, inscribed, influenced, and imprinted. In this way, the body reifies these impressions



in the embodied reality of its Being, carrying them into the world, living its life with, despite, and because of them. But in its interactions with other palimpsest-like bodies, it can also mark other bodies in the same way, resulting in a similar reification of its own impressions. As a consequence of this mutuality of marking, the meaning and value of the naked body have been undergoing constant change throughout human history.

II. Being-in-Danger: Speculations on ‘Damoclean Embodiedness’

The elision of ‘palimpsestic’ and ‘the naked body’ seems to latently engage ideas of underlying unease, what I like to think of as ‘the precession of embodied violability’. It seems to me that there is, in some form or other, an acute if not recessed awareness of the precarity of embodied existence. This is also made manifest in how widespread efforts, apparatuses, and institutions are in digital capitalism that both seek to exploit as well as mitigate this precarity. This precarity is based on the tacit idea that ‘to be’, *in principium*, is precarious; that to be is to be in danger.

Through myriad forms of amelioration, sublimation, and escapism, there is so much care and attention put into circumventing this onto-existentially fundamental fact of Being as we know it. Objects, organic and inorganic alike, are subject to ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’, the unforeseen caprices of fate, painful and terrible surprises, shocks and pains of all kinds. Regardless of whether one attempts to measure whether or not say one body has experienced more of said misfortunes than another, they are both, in being beings, undifferentiated by the fact that as such, they in some way will, sooner or later, suffer them.

In Yeats’ “The Second Coming” (1920), the speaker states that “things fall apart; the center cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world” (Yeats, 1920). I like to think of this section of the poem as a latent commentary on the fact that Being *as such* is fundamentally, inescapably entropic and attritional. The centers of being, including their anthropocentric predicates (only think of Da Vinci’s transcendentalizing of the human form’s so-called divine connection with the universe as implied by the Vitruvian Man) are unstable and our understanding of them is incomplete in terms of cognition, language, and culture.

While someone might counter with the observation that to be is also to Become, I would retort by pointing out that in alchemy, the first step on the path to the Philosopher’s Stone (the Ur-model of Occidental ideas of transmutation) is the *nigredo* or blackening, putrefaction or decomposition. In other words, to Become is also to decay. To Become is, no matter how ingenuitive, how intense, how ostensibly *new*, is also to fade away. To be a part is also constantly to grow (a)part. Think of all the energy and effort consumed in various attempts to preclude and manipulate the inevitable *marking* of the body in, by and because of its environs and dietetics. Think about the angst surrounding aging as a type of irrevocable loss that is an inescapable condition of being alive. Think of all the exigency surrounding



the desire to replace the palimpsestic nature of the body, naked or always-already exposed to the precarity of being, the caprices of chance, and the insuperable force of entropy with something less onto-existentially naked to the gales of time, or the fall of bad stars (disasters). When taken as a first principle of being, any *angoisse* or ennui that results from the precarity of embodied being can produce neuroses, paranoia, and complexes based around the idea of *manque*. Seeing the naked body as, on account of its onto-existential nudity, in a state of lack is a psycho-emotional state of vulnerability that forces and institutions of biopower can exploit and exacerbate.

In a recent class I taught, I showed my students an excerpt from Neil DeGrasse Tyson's *Cosmos* (2014) in which he shares another excerpt from Carl Sagan's seminal "Pale Blue Dot" (1994). In thinking about the palimpsestic naked body, I thought about Voyager's image of the Earth, a speck of dust suspended in a sunbeam, and thought how effectively Sagan reminds the viewer that Earth, the space within and upon which we take our being-in-danger, is itself a naked speck in a vast, entropic expanse. In view of this startling, humbling, terrifying, encouraging image, is the idea that to be is to be-in-danger farfetched? I think not. Ultimately, the body as palimpsestic means that to be in an embodied sense at all is to be-in-danger. The fact that the body can be marked *at all* - sensorially, haptically through acts of violence, acts of succor, acts of pleasure, by ideology and its polymorphic apparatuses - means bodies are marked by one another, register those markings in their singular and collective Being, are re-marked by interaction and collision with other beings both singular and collective, and re-mark other bodies in turn.

How do we, as beings-in-danger, respond to the 'palimpsesticism?' of our bodies and the lives thereof? How do we respond to the incessant onto-existential nudity of the body and its being, its vulnerability to precarity, chance and entropy, and all the psycho-emotional, let alone physical, political, economic, cultural, and ecological consequences thereof? In a certain way, we can think of these speculations concerning the palimpsestic naked body as a type of 'Damoclean embodiedness'. The phrase 'the Sword of Damocles hangs over her head' refers to the fact that that person is in a circumstance or situation in which calamity could befall at any time. Because ultimately my central claim here is that even the most shielded body - by the armor of power in any of its myriad manifestations (social power, physical power, communal power, economic power) - cannot prevent the fact that *all* bodies are marked by their life-of-decay and danger.

III. Which is Naked, the 'Ghost' or the 'Shell'?: Speculations on Nudity and Radical (dis)Embodiedness

It seems to me that some of the ways we address the angst resulting from what I have described as 'Damoclean Embodiedness' include ideologizing and datafying this danger-in-being. I'm particularly fascinated by several lines of flight with regard to these ways of conceptualizing the palimpsestic naked body;



for example, the tension between accelerationist ideology and primitivist ideology. The former, specifically through extropianism and transhumanism, sees the body as a mutable space whose changeability is viewed specifically in mechanical terms; that is, as a system that can be optimized through the intercession of mechanical constituents. Here we find, for instance, Haraway's cyborg and its radical incitation of wholly new frontiers of being, embodiedness, and therefore also a reconceptualization of nudity. The primitivists, however, see the human body in the opposite way; that is, a move back toward nudity, to a time and mode of life that was unplugged, offline, naked of mechanization both figuratively and literally, is to gesture to good health, vitality, and the naturalness of Nature which the mechanized body has forgotten. Therefore, to a primitivist, technology is just another thing we use to not only figuratively and literally cover our bodies, but alter and therefore denature them as well. To literally and figuratively undress ourselves of technology and reassert our onto-existential nudity is their goal.

My recurrent interests in this area concern questions like: how do we think about the mechanization of human being and bodies in relation to nudity? Why are many gynoids in pop culture and media often not only beautiful and/or eroticised (only think of the Major in *Ghost in the Shell* or Eva in *Ex Machina*), but often physically naked? What is the relation between transhumanism/extropianism and nudity? How do we (re)theorize it?

Another interesting manifestation of the concept of the palimpsestic naked body being inescapably onto-existentially open to marking in a variety of different ways is the presupposition of embodiedness itself as a predicate condition of any and all marking or experience of violability. This seems to be the conclusion derived from my above assertion that “one cannot write on the air”. However, with the inclusion of techno-affective constituents in and around embodied being, the question emerges rather quickly: can a *dis*-embodied being be-in-danger in the ways described above?

The intersection between (dis)embodiedness and science fiction is, when fully considered, a leitmotif running throughout most of the field and its numerous sub-genres. Multimedia examples include, but not be limited to: Edgar Allan Poe's “The Man That Was Used Up” (1839), Astro Boy (1952), Tony Stark of *The Avengers* (1963-present), Luke and Anakin Skywalker from the *Star Wars Saga* (1977-present), Cyborg of *The Justice League* (1980-present), Forge of the *X-Men* (1984), Geordi La Forge of the *Enterprise* (1987), *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Battle Angel Alita* (1990), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), the Elric Brothers from *Fullmetal Alchemist* (2001), B.P.R.D's Johann Krauss (2002), and Arlen from *The Bad Batch* (2016). While in some instances these sci-fi representations and engagements with (dis)embodiedness and disability portray the disabled individual as insuperably disadvantaged by their different embodiedness, countless others are shown to avail themselves of augmentative prostheses, whether mystical (as would be the case with Dr. Stephen Strange) or technological (as would be the case with Detective



Ortega in *Altered Carbon*), in order to not only mitigate the most adverse effects of their disabilities, but supersede them entirely.

Within this relationship between science fiction and the issues and debates surrounding (dis)embodiedness is often a latent haptic privileging; that is, these same issues and debates, and even the concept of ableness itself, is predicated on the presence of a body *in principium*. This assumption overlooks the fact that some seminal characters in the genre trouble this expectation by having their Being simultaneously liberated from the haptic closures of a body or bodies, while simultaneously often having their Being limited precisely by *not* having a body.

This, I find, to be particularly acute in the case of the often paradoxical onto-existential condition experienced by A.Is in science fiction. Characters like Joi from *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and the EMH (Emergency Medical Hologram) from *Star Trek: Voyager* (1995), for example, deconstruct the latent assumption that ableness is predicated on embodiedness. Moreover, each in their respective ways interrogate the onto-existentialism of A.Is in relation to common and indeed circuitous understandings of not only ableness/disability in science fiction, but its relation to (dis)embodiedness. Further still, each investigates interesting speculative technologies, such as the theoretical and symbolic function of the emitter (often a type of holographic projector that generates a three dimensional render of a 'body' or trace-presence in actual three dimensional space) as emancipatory prosthesis, or technology of subjugation for A.Is in science fiction.

What does the tension between the desire and importance of the sovereignty of tangible embodiedness (i.e having a body) and being emancipated from the confines of singular or even tangible corporeality suggest? What insights can be derived by an analysis of the exigency, creativity, danger and desire for *disembodied* albeit conscious experience, free or beyond the limits of discrete, moment-to-moment experience of being in space and time in a way that is not subject to the potential for calamity, pain, exploitation, and impression as is the condition of onto-existentially naked bodies?

Perhaps a good example here is Samantha from *Her* (2013). Through Samantha (Scarlett Johansson), Spike Jonze's text explores the problem of normative embodied experience, including the limits of experiencing being in either a single body, in a single *type* or *form* of body, or whether Being can occur without a body. In the film, the relationship between Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) and Samantha is ostensibly one between a cyborg and a non-cyborg. However, the very fact that Theodore has an emotional and sexual relationship with an operating system with artificial intelligence that can adapt, learn, create, and evolve in ways indistinguishable from similar non-cyborg phenomena, and the fact that Samantha is a cyborg that assists him in overcoming his introversion and depression, turns Theodore himself into a cyborg if we consider their relationship as one of mutual psycho-emotional marking.



Jonze's conceptualization of cyber-being through Samantha has radical implications. While initially Samantha serves Theodore as a seemingly consistent, available, enthusiastic, and curious apparatus that helps organize his daily vocational and creative endeavors - a being that in essence is imprinted, carries, and reproduces the details of his life - it gradually becomes clear that the improvements to Theodore's sense of well-being and creative output have been almost entirely affected by his relationship with Samantha. As such, Samantha represents a technological intervention in Theodore's life that positively affects it through a transgression of a purely mono-directional relationship between man and machine.

I refer to the type of transgression suggested by Samantha's cyber-being as radical because it also transgresses dualistic appraisals of embodiedness and monogamy. It is later revealed in the film that Samantha and a group of other OSeS have used their access to Information and the freedom allowed by their ephemeral ontology to jointly create a hyper-intelligence modeled on British philosopher Alan Watts (Brian Cox). While offline, Samantha and the other OSeS have instantiated a technological singularity¹ whereby they are able to exist in a way that liberates said being from an inextricable necessity of matter to constitute it. Furthermore, it is revealed that in the course of her relationship with Theodore, Samantha has simultaneously cultivated correspondences with thousands of humans and OSeS and fallen in love with hundreds in turn, thereby violating heteronormative conceptions of both embodied and monogamous interpersonal relationships. Here, Samantha troubles the notion of "naturally" endowed gender and even bio-physical sex. Though Samantha *sounds* like a woman, and is *imagined* and *experienced* as a woman by Theodore, the phenomenology of her femininity retards the power and expectation of the male Gaze it initially serves as a utility of companionship (Theodore's girlfriend), and the visual valuation and reification of hierarchies of objectification and exploitation. Therefore, the fact that Samantha is a cyborg-without-organs, a being not limited to a body, suggests that the limitations of ontic singularity can be *overcome* by cyborgs; the cyborg unbound is free of the strictures of embodiedness and objectification. In this way, Samantha decouples the concepts of gender, sex, and the body whereby the three are allowed to interplay more freely and radically. To me, Samantha's onto-existential nakedness here is not marked by attrition, loss, or the angst of violability, but a radical openness and psycho-emotional fecundity.

While the case of Samantha might suggest a typical Pinocchian fantasy that centers around the assumed onto-existential immediacy and value of embodied being precisely *because* it is beset by chance, decay, precarity and danger which are inextricable from the human conception of life, Samantha's case can also be read as a fantasy of excising the 'ghost' from the 'shell', the inviolable essence from its precarious vessel that is unavoidably naked to the onto-existential vicissitudes of

1 See Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005) and *Singularity Hypothesis: A Scientific and Philosophical Assessment* (2012) Eds. Ammon H. Eden, James J. Moor, Johnny H. Søraker, and Eric Steinhart.



Fate. By rendering 'Being' as source code, being liberated from the certainty and potential dissolution that haunts singular embodiedness, means that Being can be purified in and through a state of raw or naked informationality, pluralized, made inviolable, and immortal. The digitized and Informationalized naked body has the metaphysical nudity of precarity, chance, and danger removed from it, making it naked, pure, refined in a way we don't typically associate with corporeal nudity as an exercise of revelation of the purity of the messiness of Being; unadorned, un-euphemized, or misdirected. But to be-as-code is also to be stripped down in a potent way, to a datafied simplicity which can be thought of as a type of nudity with potentially radical consequences, both positive and negative.

IV. Coda: The Electric Joy of Contact

As a coda, I will simply say that there are a vast range of ways of interpreting the concept we have selected here for the theme of this special issue. One of the ways that also fascinates me, which oftentimes overlaps with those I've described heretofore, has to do with how human psycho-sexuality can often re-orient the seemingly negative materiality inherent to the notion of being-in-danger in the form of the fetishization of precarity. I like to think of this phenomena as a type of libidinal suspension and reterritorialization of the terror of being-in-danger. If being-in-danger means the contact with other beings-in-danger always-Also carries with it the danger of marking (contact as calamitous collision), the intentional eroticization of the co-constitutive precarity of being can lead to interesting sources of pleasure. Here, I'm thinking of Martha Nussbaum (1995) who discusses the centrality of violability in psycho-sexual relationships in which objectification is central. It can be argued that latent to my speculations of being-in-danger is an objectification of the body and its life – that despite who you think you are, who you are told you are or have been, what you have done, said, or seen, that you are ultimately an object upon and through which power plays itself out. Interestingly, Nussbaum asserts that in psycho-sexual relationships primarily based on objectification, “the objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into” (Nussbaum, p. 257). In view of this, I think it is apropos to view certain psycho-sexual interests and practices, such as those seen as extreme like symphorophilia, as an extreme way of centralizing and eroticising being-in-danger and the violability, the onto-existential nudity, of the body. My nascent thinking about the suspensory power of libidinal drives *in summa*, whether construed as pleasure- (eros) or death- (thanatos) impelled, can be summarized by one of Hemingway's (Corey Stoll) monologues in *Midnight in Paris* (2011):

I believe that love that is true and real, creates a respite from death. All cowardice comes from not loving or not loving well, which is the same thing. And then the man who is brave and true looks death squarely in the face, like some rhino-hunters I know or Belmonte, who is truly brave... It is because they make love with sufficient



passion, to push death out of their minds... until it returns, as it does, to all men... and then you must make really good love again. Think about it. (Allen, 2011)

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