



Bodytalk Introduction

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The short essays that follow are a response to the call from International Communication Association President-Elect (now President) Barbie Zelizer to think collectively about keywords in the field of Communication. Zelizer's intent, as we interpreted it, was to use the Theme Program of the 2009 Chicago meetings to explore the lexicon started by Raymond Williams (1976) and revised by Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Meaghan Morris (2005), and to enrich the field's conceptual ground by asking scholars who don't usually write or present together to collaborate. Contributing authors to "Bodytalk" (originally a theme panel at the Chicago meetings) responded to Zelizer's call to reflect on *the body* and *embodiment*. Whereas *New Keywords* includes the term "body," Williams' original volume does not. This is one indication that embodiment has moved to center stage in Communication and cultural studies since 1976. Some of the mediating terms of that movement, reflected here, are *feeling*, *technology*, *property*, *gender*, and *race*.

In this feature collection, authors come from feminist, legal, popular, philosophical, technology, health, ethnic, and queer studies in Communication to each contribute a body punch line, putting the body to work on key questions in Communication and cultural studies and offering *International Journal of Communication* readers a lively crack in the body's conceptual greasepaint. We recognize that mind/body dualisms are misleading, but still we know that they hold captive the richest arguments against them — illustrated, for example, in everyday and even scholarly assertions of the boundary between discourse and the body, as if one ends where the other starts. We do not seek to collapse terms or referents, but together we argue that there is no body without discourse, nor any discursive formation without bodies. We also share a vernacular sense of bodies' high stakes, as places where lives are made, lost, and reconfigured in processes as unitary as birth, or as collective as exile. Bodies are the location of feeling, memory, imagination, sensation, and language, though bodies alone cannot signify or organize such possibilities. Bodies are the targets of management and liberation, in settings as closed as households, or as open as nations. Finally, bodies re-assert a sense of irreducibility even as people experiment — creatively and administratively — with new means of body modification and new forms of disembodiment. We cannot resolve the contested terms of embodiment, but we can clarify what is at stake and what else is possible in thinking about the body in key contexts. In doing so, we can offer readers, perhaps especially students, a fast track into contemporary studies of the body in Communication.

Our opening gambit comes from Janice Radway's work in progress on girls' zines in the 1990s. Radway reminds us that bodies are always already social. This is not simply to say "socially constructed" — although also true — but sociable, as in *looking for other bodies*. Girls' zine scenes are exemplary as communication, enacting the wish for company, recognition, and forms of cultural opportunity that only

groups and conversations allow. Sifting through zine communities and zines' formal attributes, Radway asks how young women used zines in the 1990s to break out of narrow slots of female embodiment into a consciously-conceived, feminist body politic — not as metaphor, but as the real thing, an intersubjective and collective body where life gets bigger against the grain of sexist suppression and modern attrition.

From the perspective of international human rights, John Erni explores the regulatory distinction between bodily "possession" (as in human autonomy in the Liberal tradition) and "ownership" (as in property rights in the transfer of parts and organs). Some might be surprised to discover, reading Erni, just how limited their organ and body part ownership rights are, despite reigning presumptions of bodily autonomy and control, even in contexts where such control is harshly withheld (e.g., in combat or incarceration). Erni calls upon critical scholars to consider variabilities in legal doctrine about body ownership, and to move away from conservative *and* critical assertions of the body's sacred coherence, a coherence claimed against the invasions of the market and the state. He invites us to think, in other words, more nimbly and concretely than moral narratives enable us to do about how bodies move in the world as material objects.

Carrie Rentschler draws from forthcoming work on the notorious Kitty Genovese murder case to reveal bodies in crime as dense and collectively-produced composites, not the pristine coherences that other sorts of moral narratives propose. Genovese was the Queens, New York, woman whose sexual assault and street murder in 1964 was witnessed by many passersby, none of whom intervened. For over 40 years, the Genovese case and its archive have been used around the world, in technical, professional, and popular contexts, as *the* illustration of urban anomie and social breakdown in the United States. Rentschler examines that archive to suggest that the compulsive use of facial images in reporting the crime (especially pictures of Genovese) tells us little about Genovese herself, but much about the social landscape and the practice of urban witness and anxiety. In the process, Rentschler troubles the transparency of physiognomy, the "science" of faces, and the disquieting, cyclic enthusiasm for it as a source of "truth and proof" about social groups. However, she also joins historian Carlo Ginzburg in the practice of counter-physiognomy, keeping faces in the picture and asking new questions about how they signify and secure human particularities that the regulatory discourses of law and news can't see.

Thomas Streeter speaks to the feel of computing online — call it allure, compulsion, losing oneself — as not simply a sidebar feature of online practice, but "a part of how the modern world imagines itself." Drawing from his forthcoming book, *The Net Effect*, on the cultural politics of Internet structure, Streeter finds in embodied feeling a challenge to the routine assertions of disembodiment as that which distinguishes Internet practice from earlier media use. Streeter's archive reveals what he calls the "pleasures of the limited unknowability of interacting with computers." Personal computers drew their developers into new experiences and feelings, but it was a safe newness, a *limited* unknowability in which, they wrongly imagined, the routines of everyday life were at a distance. Such a pleasure was key, says Streeter, in articulating personal computing to historical narratives of the Romantic individual, by figures as disparate as corporate mavericks and open source heroes. In the contemporary moment, Streeter argues, "this metaphorical role may be a more important effect of the Internet than its actual technical capacities."

Jennifer Horner deconstructs her own and colleagues' practices as health researchers in producing and evaluating sexual health messages for young people. Targeted messages in health campaigns are focused, efficient, and carefully crafted to reach intended audiences for pro-social effects, such as the reduction of rates of sexually transmitted illness. But what would happen if researchers paid equally close attention to the other side of *targeting* — the control of young bodies through the putatively disembodied practices of research? With a telling example drawn from an interview transcript with a young woman about using a condom during a recent sexual encounter, Horner tracks how little of the woman's talk about her sexual body makes it into the study, and how equally verboten is the physical and sexual experience of the researcher, despite similarities and empathies with the researched. But, rather than closing with opposition in the meaning of "targets," Horner proposes *détente*, where the messages and bodies of health research in Communication might be more sympathetically and fruitfully juxtaposed.

Through a sequence of images from the campaign trail, Leola Johnson reads the body of Barack Obama as a "Magic Negro," a character long encoded in U.S. popular culture to heal the spiritual wounds of a dominant white populace. According to Johnson, as a light-skinned, mixed race man, Obama's career as a Magic Negro breaks with the convention of a dark-skinned character (e.g., Michael Clarke Duncan's character in *The Green Mile*, Whoopi Goldberg's in *Ghost*, or Queen Latifah's in *The Secret Life of Bees*), reflecting larger struggles over the meaning of Blackness and Black embodiment in an era of race-mixing and immigration. Johnson does not deny Obama's capacities for addressing multiple constituencies, but interrogates public projections upon him as savior rather than politician, a racial projection that Obama the *realpolitician* is bound to disappoint, opening him to punitive and equally racialized judgments and retractions.

Finally, in my own essay on optimism, I propose the body as the medium through which cultural forms enable new sensibilities and new political solidarities. I make this argument through the form and reception of two films from the queer canon, *By Hook or By Crook* (2002) and *Brokeback Mountain* (2005). Both are queer *class* texts, and while both are beloved by audiences, each promises something quite different in the look, tale, and feel of friendship in contexts of anti-queer constraint and class deprivation. I argue in favor of the low-budget solidarities and aesthetic energies of *By Hook* over *Brokeback's* grandeur, bad attachment, and solemn march toward death. With this comparison, I hope to renew interest in friendship as embodied feeling (not simply as ideology), social form, and under-sung political resource. What can friendship's optimism do for cultural politics that melodrama — in life, as in film — cannot?

From the social body of zine-making, the material body of law, and the composite body of crime, to the Romantic body on-line, the targeted body of health research, the raced body of the Presidency, and the optimistic body of friendship, "Bodytalk" takes Communication insight to the embodied world, and returns to our field the presence of the body in subjectivity, governmentality, ontology, modernity, politics, and affect. Bodies, we tell you, are everywhere.



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