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## Chapter 6

# (Re)embodying which body?

## Philosophical, cross-cultural and personal reflections on corporeality

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**Corporeal...** *a.* bodily, physical, material; **corporeality...** *n.*

**Embody...** *vt.* make (idea etc.) actual or discernible; (of thing) be an expression of; include, comprise; **embodiment** *n.*<sup>1</sup>

### Modernity's 'great divides'

In the seventeenth century, as is well known, a certain French philosopher conceptually divided the world into two disparate substances: matter (*res extensa*, or 'extended substance') and mind (*res cogitans*, or 'thinking substance'). Matter, as Rene Descartes described it, was spatially extended, determinate, and mechanical; mind, on the contrary, had no spatial presence whatsoever – it was pure thought, free of all physical constraint and limitation. While animals, plants, and indeed nature as a whole were composed exclusively of mechanical matter, and while God consisted entirely of mind, humans alone – according to Descartes – were a mixture of the two substances. The human body, like other animal bodies, was a completely mechanical configuration; the immaterial mind somehow interacted with this physical body from a location within the human brain.<sup>2</sup>

A general theme and even *raison d'être* of this collection of essays is that multiple contemporary crises in the *ecosocius* can be traced to the 'great divides' so defining of the modern era: between 'West' and 'Other', humans and 'nonhumans', and culture and nature.<sup>3</sup> Ushered in by the long Cartesian 'moment' of the 1600s, itself rooted in Renaissance interpretations of classical Greek philosophy<sup>4</sup> and particularly the ancient break from *mythos* to *logos*,<sup>5</sup> this period in Enlightenment Europe saw an intensified decoupling of ideas regarding mind and culture from those concerning body and nature. As transcendent, disembodied minds were elevated over proliferating abstractions of mechanised bodies – automata<sup>6</sup> – from cellular to cosmic scales, western psyches arguably became increasingly detached

from the human and earthly bodies with which they are embedded and entangled.<sup>7</sup> Human nature has thus been rendered increasingly deaf to a stilled and desacralised more-than-human nature that is its mirror,<sup>8</sup> entrenching the Aristotelian position that ‘Man’ alone is a political animal, with nature-beyond-the-human rendered as politically mute.<sup>9</sup>

Combined with the privileging of calculative rationality<sup>10</sup> and positivist modes of verification<sup>11</sup> as rules for generating valid knowledge, this idealistic transcendence of mind from matter characterises the modern disembodied impetus of current concern. Signalling both a disconnect between mind and matter, and a hierarchisation that sets abstract thought above and over a projection of a machine-like body, this impetus deepens a corresponding set of binaries, that are also hierarchised.<sup>12</sup> As summarised in Table 1, we find ourselves living in the shadow of two thousand years of hierarchical value-ordering in western thought.<sup>13</sup> Through this, a reality has been constructed and normalised whereby only humans, and often only some humans, possess intelligence and mind; and where at the other end of the hierarchy, plants, for example, are viewed merely as ‘vegetables’<sup>14</sup> – dispossessed of the capacities of movement, perception, communication, and self-directed *telos*, and thus usefully backgrounded as existing only for the instrumental ends of humans. In this hierarchical ontology only the intelligence characteristic of (particular) human entities can confer moral considerability, since only this intelligence is understood as possessing scope for communication, purpose, and subjectivity.

Table 6.1 Plato’s and Aristotle’s value hierarchies of the faculties of soul

Plato		Aristotle	
Spirited	Enabling activity and volition	Intellective	Rational soul possessing mind/reason ‘human excellence’
Rational	Enabling intelligence and self-control. Associated with reason/mind/opinion and located in men who are thus able to rule	Locomotive	Mobility found in humans and animals but <i>not</i> plants
		Desiderative	Able to desire, i.e. to have appetite, passion, wish – found in humans and animals
Appetitive	Associated with pleasure/pain/desire as well as passivity. Located in the ruled – slaves, women, children and slaves. Plants as fixed, rooted, passive	Perceptive	Able to sense pleasure and pain – found in humans and animals
		Nutritive	Mechanical ability to feed and reproduce. Plants possess only this ‘soul’, i.e. otherwise rendered as passive.

Source: Based on M. HALL, 2011; 13 after V. Plumwood, 2006.

The ontological denial of these latter faculties in other kinds of embodied being, including, historically, in the bodies of the non-western Other,<sup>15</sup> permits the doing of harm without *recognition* that harm has been done. Although often it is more complex than this, in that the denial of capacities for communication, purpose, and subjectivity in 'non-human others' perhaps manifests more as *disavowal*: as the simultaneous acknowledgement of harms caused, accompanied by a strategy – an apparent solution – to seemingly mitigate this harm.<sup>16</sup> An early example of this, and of the pathology that such 'solutions' can embody, comes from the post-Cartesian vivisectionists. Whilst operating in a Cartesian mode, i.e. construing animals as soulless automata, these scientists would also cut the vocal cords of their experimental subjects so that they would not be able to hear the ensuing cries of pain.<sup>17</sup> Through this apparent 'solution' their embodied acknowledgement of the communicative and experiential capacities of animals was denied, so as to literally make the animals subject to their experiments into mute objects. Strategies of disavowal – of the simultaneous acknowledgement of, and turning away from, harms caused – abound today through the sale and purchase of various forms of tradable 'offsets' for 'solving' problems of environmental harm. Purchase of environmental 'credits' generated in one place are thus considered to 'solve' damage effected somewhere else, although arguably such 'solutions' also entrench a disconnection (or splitting-off) from the continuation of damage-producing behaviours that such offsets require.<sup>18</sup>

The effects of modernity's incomplete movement towards ontological divides between mind and matter, culture and nature, West and Other, masculine and feminine, then, are widely understood to be a denigration of bodily, sensuous, and ecological grounds for knowing and feeling.<sup>19</sup> As observed elsewhere in this volume (see, for example, chapters by Harris, Holden, and Young), this is a denigration that frequently also targeted women and non-Europeans as categories of humans considered to be closer to 'the body' and to 'nature'. In parallel, the production of a nature-beyond-the-human<sup>20</sup> that is distant, stilled, and 'outside', has created this nature as usefully amenable to objectification, instrumentalisation, and myriad associated violations.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, this semblance of control – this thinking that 'things stand mute and inert' until 'modern man' chooses to speak of them<sup>22</sup> – is frequently accompanied by dismay, as the materiality and unruly agency of natures-beyond-the-human burst through in the environmental and social fall-outs of industrial processes, so as to require corrective and frequently costly responses.

Given the *disembodying* hypostasis of contemporary pathologies in socionatural configurations, a reconnecting and compositionist<sup>23</sup> 'politics of nature' frequently advocates practices and strategies of *(re)embodiment*, echoed in calls for academic scholarship to *(re)insert corporeality* as the always present ground of experience.<sup>24</sup> Such corrective movements are

understood in part to encourage choices towards expressions of corporeality that (re)acknowledge the material basis of being: 'the inescapable consequence of our physicality' known through the feelings of our bodies;<sup>25</sup> and 'the language of the earth, and ... of our bodies'.<sup>26</sup> Through this acknowledgement, (re)connections between human and earthly bodies are to be engendered so as to constitute correctives to the excesses and violences constituting the abstracted life and labour so necessary for industrial capitalism.<sup>27</sup> As such, this (re)embodying impetus tends to urge some sort of (re)turn to, and/or embrace of, 'the body' that was left behind by the disembodied Cartesian mind of the Enlightenment. It is suggestive of a re-entwining of 'bodymind' – a remembering that body and psyche 'are not separate entities but mysteriously a totality'<sup>28</sup> – combined with more attentive ecological attunement of human 'bodyminds' with the embodied entities comprising more-than-human natures.

At the same time, however, understandings, experiences, and performances of 'the body' are also historically and culturally situated, caught within specific regimes of truth that make possible particular embodiments and embodied experiences.<sup>29</sup> Acknowledgement of the particular mind-body split associated with the Cartesian moment in itself affirms that specific, culturally inflected, historically situated socialisation processes, associated with language learning, come into play to variously shape human encounters with, and understandings of, both corporeality and 'nature-beyond-the-human'.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, reversion to the mechanistic body-as-automata as conceived by Descartes would surely be contradictory to the hopeful, healing thrust of current calls for re-embodiment. The query in my title – '(re)embodying which body?' – reflects the productive complexity and ambiguity conferred through locating 'the body', corporeality and embodiment as always both caught within, as well as performing, the particularities of historical and cultural contexts.

In what follows, I respond to this query with some particular philosophical, cross-cultural, and personal gestures, the latter, denoted in indented italics,<sup>31</sup> based on fragments of my own memories of particular experiences of corporeality. My intention is to highlight the creative force of contradictions contained in the categories 'the body', 'corporeality', and '(re)embodiment' that, as noted by de Lucia (this volume), acknowledges that 'the body' is 'epistemically plural' as well as politically situated. A diversity of corporealities – understood, experienced, and performed bodies – is thus always at play in worldly and world-making participations. This includes any normative call for (re)embodiments resistant to the disembodimenting impetus of capitalist symbolic and material orders.

## From docile to diffuse bodies: poststructuralism and corporeality

*1987 – Discipline. For almost every day of ten years of professional dance training I have ‘done morning class’. I see myself in the mirror, extending into an arabesque – all lines and taut coherence – punctuated by closures into neat fifth positions: a parody of mimesis through which I perform my mirrored body in this daily ritual of ballet school confinement. Sometimes, all this disciplined bodily participation permits the exhilarating sense of freedom that may emerge from repetitively practised technique. But often, control and composure mask the effort, sweat, and sometimes physical pain that is the ground of my experience.*

Discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience).<sup>32</sup>

You will be organised, you will be an organism, you will articulate your body – otherwise you’re just depraved. You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted – otherwise you’re just a deviant. You will be a subject, nailed down as one, a subject of the enunciation recoiled into a subject of the statement – otherwise you’re just a tramp.<sup>33</sup>

A gift of poststructuralist thought has been the foregrounding of the ways that historical contexts, comprising particular configurations of human and other-than-human natures, confer possibility and constraint to the known and the experienced. The gendered, sexualised, normal, and mad body; the lived body whose immanent and heterogenous life, via consolidated power relations, can be abstracted and calculated as exchangeable general labour;<sup>34</sup> the body that can be punished directly by sovereign powers, or self-controlled through the biopower sustaining elite political economy constellations: these shifting corporealities are always indelibly entangled with regimes of truth that potentiate particular embodied knowledges and experiences.

Michel Foucault, in particular, has encouraged a methodical approach, involving archaeologies of discursive knowledge production and genealogies of institutional *dispositifs*, to enable identification of associated objects of knowledge, technical and calculative renderings, and the interplay of discursive and institutional configurations that create and accompany ‘regimes of truth’.<sup>35</sup> For Foucault, ‘the body’, that seemingly most material ground of being, is fully caught, inscribed, and repetitively enacted<sup>36</sup> within discursive webs, whose diagnosis may encourage awareness and contestation. While discourse structures and performs multiplicitous

and networked details that can sediment into institutional *dispositifs* and relatively stable assemblages,<sup>37</sup> change becomes possible through reflection and critical understanding of historically empowered scripts shaping the acts that perform social reality.<sup>38</sup> As Foucault writes in his essay 'The subject and power',<sup>39</sup> we need to check both 'the type of reality with which we are dealing' *and* 'the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization' of this type of reality, if we wish to both understand and adjust the power-effects that are thereby amplified.

This, then, offers a perspective on the possibility for change to emerge from embeddedness in particular regimes of truth, without recourse to the abstract-universal certainty (or Truth) assumed by Enlightenment science's desire for a decontextualised, objective view-from-everywhere-and-nowhere.<sup>40</sup> Key amongst Foucault's insights is that bourgeois, capitalist political economy requires certain sorts of labouring bodies that thus have (had) to be made through the 'conduct of conduct' («conduire des conduites») comprising an associated and consolidating liberal governmentality.<sup>41</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, for example, Foucault emphasised that new regimes of governance were structured and bolstered by new social sciences of the modern era, which recursively and productively reinforced new disciplining techniques of management and administration.<sup>42</sup> The rise of the bourgeois class and the Age of Reason in Europe thus was accompanied by a novel emphasis on partitioning, classifying, codifying, and calculating 'the body'.<sup>43</sup> It is this calculative emphasis that constructs, subjects, manages, and accumulates corporeality as both a fungible source of homogenised abstract labour, and as utility-maximising 'body-machines', whilst simultaneously permitting the rationalisation and administration of seemingly docile, manageable bodies as populations.<sup>44</sup>

Arguably, the dissociative effects of these processes of subjectification through which bodies 'learn to labour'<sup>45</sup> have frequently been exacerbated by experiences of trauma. The workhouses, mines, slaveries, and genocidal colonial wars accompanying the modern will to industrial capitalism were (and are) run-through with individualised and (un)predictable violences:<sup>46</sup> shocks that sever a subject from the already known, creating impossibilities that cannot be psychically integrated.<sup>47</sup> These circumstances are relevant to a call for 're-embodiment' because the docile body organised so as to labour, may also be a traumatised body: a body that experiences itself as 'foreign' in its spontaneous impulses to surrender and flow; a subject who has learned it is 'vital to suppress feeling and emotional expression'<sup>48</sup> – to neutralise affect and memory so as to withdraw from the dangers and experiential vulnerabilities posed by engaged embodied existence.<sup>49</sup> Critiquing the societal normalisations informing much psychiatric practice, in *The Politics of Experience* R. D. Laing thus famously wrote that '[t]his state of affairs represents an almost unbelievable devastation of our experience':

[o]ur capacity to think, except in the service of what we are dangerously deluded in supposing is our self-interest ... is pitifully limited: *our capacity even to see, hear, touch, taste and smell is so shrouded in veils of mystification that an intensive discipline of unlearning is necessary for anyone before one can begin to experience the world afresh, with innocence, truth and love ...*<sup>50</sup>

Movements towards a freer embodiment, attuned to the flourishing of diverse human and more-than-human bodies, thus intrinsically requires a political process of unlearning the docile, labouring, traumatised body of such utility for the accumulations driving capitalist political economy.<sup>51</sup>

Under the *neoliberalism* of recent decades, corporealities have become increasingly entangled in what Thomas Lemke, following Foucault, identifies as the 'consistent expansion of the economic form to apply to the social sphere, thus eliding any difference between the economy and the social'.<sup>52</sup> This movement has been accompanied by the transposition of 'economic analytical schemata and criteria for economic decision-making onto spheres which are not, or certainly not exclusively, economic areas'.<sup>53</sup> Foucault's insights here are key in part because they extend to the recent emergence of a neoliberal 'environmentality'<sup>54</sup> that promotes and makes necessary a neoliberal conduct of conduct in the sphere of socio-ecological relations.<sup>55</sup> Proliferating new conceptions of nature-beyond-human thus conceptually entrain these natures with 'market-based solutions' based on ownership of newly configured commodity units such as 'ecosystem services', 'biodiversity offsets', and 'carbon credits'.<sup>56</sup> As I have observed elsewhere,<sup>57</sup> nature-beyond-the-human is thereby made docile through a conceptual transformation that seeks to catch it 'in a [new] system of subjection', whereby its productive characteristics can be further 'calculated, organized, technically thought' and 'invested with power relations'.<sup>58</sup> Like the human body, and the body-politic of populations, nature refigured as a provider of 'ecosystem services' and a 'bank of natural capital' is 'entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it to productively bend and release its immanent forces towards economic utility'.<sup>59</sup> The distributed neoliberal microphysics of *biopower* that both makes and rules corporeality and subjectivity thus 'not only regulates human interactions' and 'seeks directly to rule over human nature'.<sup>60</sup> It also extends to nature-beyond-the-human so as to become a technology of power over multiplicitous bodies that 'makes live and lets die':<sup>61</sup> a politics of life itself.<sup>62</sup>

**2000 – Ecstasy.** *A different kind of repetition. Opening into rhythms and illicit spaces. The feeling of freedom in the 'temporary autonomous zones'<sup>63</sup> of raves and squat parties. Gatherings of souls similarly alienated by the boundaries, regulations, violences and inequities of formal society. In this urgent dance my heart opens, my soul soars, my consciousness seems simultaneously to permeate*



*through and fly from all the cells of my body. I feel connected – improvisationally open to the moving bodies gathered here. Senses bathed in stimulation. Synaesthetically fused, perceptually expanded. Fully alive, and at home in this wild, weird, industrial world.*

Every single molecule that Charis is taking into her lungs has been sucked in and out of the lungs of countless thousands of other people, many times. Come to that, every single molecule in her body has been part of somebody else's body, of the bodies of many others, going back and back, and then past human beings, all the way to dinosaurs, all the way to the first planktons. Not to mention vegetation. We are all a part of everybody else, she muses. We are all a part of everything.<sup>64</sup>

When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.<sup>65</sup>

If Foucault affirms diagnosis of the structuring epistemic and institutional grids shaping corporeal understanding and experience as essential for appropriate ethical and other responses,<sup>66</sup> then poststructuralist philosophers Deleuze and Guattari, in their resolutely non-totalising affective ontology of rhizomes, nomadism, and becoming, offer conceptual strategies for exploding these structuring grids. Inspired by avant-garde writer, performer and theatre director Antonin Artaud to whom the term 'body without organs' (BwO) is attributed (see above), as well as by the burgeoning anti-psychiatry movement of 1960s and 1970s, their 'plateau' 'November 28, 1947: How do you make yourself a Body without Organs?' approaches 'the body' as *diffuse* – as 'fluid-multiple-open'<sup>67</sup> – rather than as (only) organised and particulate. For Deleuze and Guattari, experiential 'lines of flight' permit escape from the hyper-regulated and docile mind-body spaces naturalised under the striations of modernity's State Science.<sup>68</sup> Corporeality here makes possible transgression of the organised bodies constituting abstract labour and utility-maximising consumption, so as to shatter – through experiences that activate transgressive affective intensities – the neat illusions maintaining the status quo. Deleuze and Guattari frequently fetishise practices of pain, negation, and absence as the routes towards these transgressive, experiential potencies. At the same time, the world they encounter – of multiplicity, ephemeral becoming, and metamorphosis – encourages a certain optimism towards the possibility for transformation, invention, and reconstitution through improvisational participations in the 'plane of proliferation, peopling and contagion' they understand as the dynamically immanent basis of being/becoming.<sup>69</sup> As they ask, '[w]hy such a dreary parade of sucked-dry, catatonicized, vitrified, sewn-up bodies, when the BwO is also full of gaiety, ecstasy, and dance?'<sup>70</sup>



Arguably, then, the BwO of poststructuralist philosophy, and the turn to affect more broadly in conceptions of corporeality, embodiment, and subjectivity,<sup>71</sup> introduces a vital infusion of mind and intelligence throughout the materiality of the body. This is an intelligent and vibrant materiality that simultaneously extends to and connects with the diverse other and distinctive bodies, not to mention vibrant matters,<sup>72</sup> constituting nature-beyond-the-human. Bodies are thus invoked not ‘as stable things or entities, but rather as processes which extend into and are immersed in worlds’, to form aspects of dynamic ‘assemblages of human and non-human processes’.<sup>73</sup> The BwO, and the consciously and unconsciously experienced lines of flight generating variously playful and improvisational intensities with other resonant bodies,<sup>74</sup> is thereby conceived and known as intrinsically and consciously ecological. Guattari, after Gregory Bateson,<sup>75</sup> thus iterates ‘ecosophy’ – ‘an ethico-political articulation...’ between the three ecological registers of ‘the environment, social relations and human subjectivity’ – as epistemologically necessary so as to re-embed relationships between interior (subjective) and exterior (social and environmental) potencies.<sup>76</sup>

Invocations of (re)embodiment(s) that contest the disembodying impetus of modernity’s ‘great divides’, clearly require attention to the particular corporealities constituting the realm of possibility for this productive, but problematic, impetus. Invoking such attention perhaps shifts the call away from a simple encouragement for (re)embodiment, and towards identification of the specific corporealities expressed and proliferating in particular regimes of truth, so as to assert their identifiable power-effects in socio-ecological registers. This positioning recognises the mind-full corporeality – the intelligent physicality and materiality – of bodies that is always present as the ground of being; whilst acknowledging that context as well as choice consolidates particular embodied expressions and experiences of this corporeality. It is an affirmation that *difference makes a difference* in understanding, performing, and manifesting corporeality. This theme is taken further in the next section to draw attention to the significance of diverse cultural inflections regarding corporeality, in combination with the infinitely different ‘demands’ effected by the sheer diversity of embodied natures-beyond-the-human.

### **Difference makes a difference: cultural-corporeal inflections and affective animisms**

*2007 – Pain and healing. I’m lying under a lone shepherd tree, sun bright on the white bark that gives Boscia albitrunca its distinctive name. I’ve promised myself 48 hours alone in the red desert west of the Dâures massif in Namibia where I’ve worked on and off for more than twenty years. My intention is to fully*

*face the pain spread throughout my body. A burning that made its presence known following an exhilarating summer several years previously spent in street protests for social and environmental justice, with the exposure to tear gas toxins and other violences that this entailed.<sup>77</sup> I dive deep into the pain and into what feels like a jagged 'arrowhead' wedged deep between two vertebrae, and wonder where and how I will find a healer able to see and remove this festering source of discomfort. Unexpectedly, some months later I am with friends in a clearing in the upper Amazon, drinking a potent brew of the complex plant medicine ayahuasca. Don Luca, the 'doctor', reads me as he weaves a gentle icaros or spirit song into my consciousness, the rhythmic, cleansing movement of the leaves of the chacapa fan drawing my experience into the mysterious breathing of the forest. He says, 'you have pain in your body. It comes from a desert spirit that you did not know how to protect yourself from, and it will feel jagged like broken glass, just here', pointing to the exact place that I feel to be the source. And then, 'I can remove it – for \$20'. Following this extraction that is also an exchange, I wander to the edge of the clearing where the vegetal complexity of the forest pulses with a life force of vibrant colours, iridescent in the dark. I join this dance, arms light like rainbow butterfly wings. For the first time in years I am free of physical pain.*

She is the one who knows the organs, if they move from one side to the other side. And there is one thing here in the middle – if you touch here he kicks. If that *!arab* is moving you just push a little bit push push, so that it can come in the middle. [...]

After we've given birth, after three months the child must be cut. Now those small tattoos, it's kind of preventing the sicknesses to come – like child sicknesses or paralysis. If the child is not cut they get those sicknesses. That's why we are cutting them with the tattoos and we put in the *abu||horo* – the ostrich egg shell – and the kudu skin into the tattoos. After that we take that black material and in that black material we put 5 cents, plus there are two things we are putting in there – one is a *≠âis* – it's a thought type of plant – it acts to protect against bad thoughts of the people. *≠Âis* is a *soxa* plant. These are very special plants. They will not work if you don't give something to them in exchange. And we also put in – they said it's an underground rhino – the ant lion – *!gudubes*. [...]

Abraham Ganuseb and Andreas !Kharuxab told me that when they are dancing the *arus* something is talking into their head and told them what to use [for healing]. We ask them how they know all these plants that they are using for stomach pain, coughing, everything, and they told us that some of the plants, the old people (*kai khoen*) used them, but some of the things they get from the spirit which is talking with them when they dance...<sup>78</sup>

If poststructuralist philosophy complexifies corporeality – drawing attention to how ‘the body’ and embodiment are always caught within regimes of truth influencing what can be known, experienced and contested – then cultural difference generates further disturbances in approaching bodily and earthly ground. Re-embodiment thus may not be as simple as resuscitating the intelligent materiality of human and other-than-human bodies, so as to counter the detachment effected by Cartesian abstract thought. This is because, and as illustrated in the testimonies above, cultural diversity seems also to generate corporeal as well as affective diversity. Or at least, once again, to shape the truths by which ‘the body’, corporeality and nature-beyond-the-human can and ought to be known, practised and performed.<sup>79</sup> This means that whilst it seems appropriate to acknowledge that ‘there cannot help but be some overlap between my direct, visceral experience and the felt experience of other persons’,<sup>80</sup> these very visceral and felt experiences are themselves filtered through ontological assumptions shaped by cultural (as well as personal) specificity. Despite the apparent universals of biology, different peoples of the world may express and know different conceptions of corporeality and embodiment.

To add further complexity, the diversely different embodied forms of multiple selves constituting nature-beyond-the-human create depth<sup>81</sup> and demand variation in embodied and cultural engagement with these selves. Cultures relying closely for sustenance on neighbourhood natures know this very well: the seeds of particular food plants require just the right amounts of rain and sun, and the agency of diverse predators – from slugs to elephant – are the focus of much attention and varied manipulations. The material agencies of a series of non-human fallouts of industrial processes may demand even closer anthropogenic attention: from radioactive waste committing economical and ecological attention for unimaginable numbers of future generations,<sup>82</sup> to decaying and indigestible plastic detritus causing death by starvation through clogging the alimentary tracts of numerous seabirds.<sup>83</sup> Approaches to natures-beyond-the-human may range from utilisation, appreciation and empathy, to ambivalence and detachment – even horror, disgust, and fear,<sup>84</sup> and all of these are also culturally inflected.

As Gregory Bateson<sup>85</sup> and more recently Eduardo Kohn<sup>86</sup> have emphasised, *difference makes a difference*. This is a truism that nonetheless requires acknowledgement, given the disruptions of cultural difference accompanying the universalising tendencies of modernity,<sup>87</sup> and its extension in modern totalisations of nature-beyond-the-human as Nature, ‘biodiversity’, and now ‘ecosystem services’ and ‘natural capital’. There is a mirror here in the familiar significant cultural divide between the conceptually pacified and scientifically knowable Nature of the Enlightenment, and the lively, cacophony of selves-beyond-the-human known by modernity’s necessarily animist Other. As the Nobel Laureate and molecular biologist Jacques

Monod wrote in the 1970s, science necessarily ‘subverts everyone of the mythical ontogenies upon which the animist tradition... has based morality’ so as to establish ‘the objectivity principle’ as the value that defines ‘objective knowledge itself’.<sup>88</sup>

An oft-invoked corrective to such reasoning thus is of a (re)invigorated amodern experience of the alive sentience of other-than-human-natures as animate and relational subjects, rather than inanimate and atomised objects. As such, ‘animism’ is a descriptor that enfolds Edward Tylor’s ‘mistaken primitives’, positioned prior to the attainment of Enlightenment rationality in his theory of religion,<sup>89</sup> with postmodern ‘eco-pagans’ of the industrial west, for whom animism is a contemporary eco-ethical ‘concern with knowing how to behave appropriately towards persons, not all of whom are human’.<sup>90</sup> It is both ‘a knowledge construct of the West’,<sup>91</sup> and a universalising term acknowledging a ‘primacy of relationality’,<sup>92</sup> as well as a set of affirmative, affective, and mimetic practices that ‘resist objectification’ by privileging an expansionary and reciprocal intersubjectivity.<sup>93</sup> Such relational connectivities, elaborated further by Harris and Holden (this volume), beautifully bind ‘the embodied self’ with multiplicitous other selves. In a systemic reversal of the rugged individualism of Enlightenment and liberal thought, it is perhaps only in full acknowledgement of this binding that the human ‘self’ can be experienced as fully ‘free’.<sup>94</sup>

**2014 – Sand, stars and fire.** *‘You are demanding to be cooked’, says Kha||’an, pulling me up once more, and drawing me back towards the women’s voices. The complex polyphonic rhythms and harmonies, the driving sharp repetitions of the women’s handclaps, the feeling of my shaking body pressed close against the shaking bodies of Kha||’an and Tsama, coalesce so that I am falling to the sand beneath my feet, all senses simultaneously open to the stars of the Kalahari sky above. Astounded by this finely-tuned yet improvisationally open series of affective intensities, I understand why anthropologist Megan Bieseles describes this bodily-mindfull-socio-ecological attunement as ‘one of humanity’s great intellectual achievements’.*<sup>95</sup>

## The rest is silence. Corporeality – embodiment – death

**2015 – Mortality.** *I write these lines as the 2015 London marathon is being run. At the first London marathon in 1981, my father ran the 26 miles in three hours. Today his days are marked by effort to maintain upright dignity as his neurological system descends into the misfiring and paralysis of Parkinson’s Disease. In witnessing this inevitable corporeal succumbing to the ‘suck’ of entropy<sup>96</sup> I feel overwhelmed by the bittersweet poignancy of our variously*

*disciplined efforts for mind to shape matter. Our worldly efforts to make manifest the diverse becomings of our dreams, knowing always the inevitability of their loss to us.*

Vast in its analytic and inventive power, modern humanity is crippled by a fear of its own animality, and of the animate earth that sustains us. [...] [the] difficult mystery of our own carnal mortality... our vulnerability, our utter dependence upon a world that can eat us.<sup>97</sup>

In this chapter I have argued that instead of emerging as a source of clarity regarding how to act and be in the world, both corporeality and embodiment are ambiguous, shifting, and dynamic affairs – sites of the continual recognition and negotiation of values. Nowhere does this ambiguity arise so strongly as in the inevitable mortality that is handmaiden to the embodied ‘thingness’ of corporeality. The intractable materiality of our individual bodies ~~thus~~ cannot help but be a reminder of an unavoidable connection: between the gift of awake embodiment that permits the flame of consciousness to flicker, if only briefly in this world; and the particulate earthly body, coalesced from cosmic sources and on a one-way street to return to these sources. We might direct mind over matter throughout life, but as we labour into death the entangled relationships between human and earthly bodies clearly are unavoidable.

Death is also a culturally inflected transition in which the ways that we have lived these entangled socio-ecological relationships become illuminated: drawing into focus our impacts and our offerings; our kindnesses, connections, and felt commonalities with each other and with natures-beyond-the-human. If ‘we’ feel a sense of kinship with the spirited materialities of earth to which we let go the individual moments of our lives, perhaps this labouring into death also becomes a return – a final homecoming – of our organic, nourishing corporeality to the embrace of both our human ancestors and the persistent (in)organic matter of life. In this acknowledgement, then, it is not only in embodied life that we might learn to live well with each other and with more-than-human-natures. It is also in approaching mortality as the inevitable consequence of this life, so as to (re)embody death, as well as life, well.


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## Notes

- 1 Definitions from H.G. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 7th ed., R.E. Allen (ed.), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, pp. 162, 239.
- 2 D. Abram, *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: Pantheon Books, 2010, p. 103.
- 3 B. Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 97.
- 4 C. Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Harper and Row, 1989(1980).
- 5 S. Žižek, *Living in the End Times*. London: Verso, 2011, p. 279; P. Feyerabend, *Conquest of Abundance: A Tale of Abstraction over the Abundance of Being*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- 6 Thus in *Discourse 5* of Rene Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (London: Penguin Books, 1968(1637), pp. 75–76) he writes of animals that '... they do not have a mind, and... it is nature which acts in them according to the disposition of their organs, as one sees that a clock, which is made up of only wheels and springs, can count the hours and measure time more exactly than we can with all our art'. Other authors argue against the thesis that Descartes considered animals to be incapable of feeling, whilst affirming his insistence on animals as automata, possessing neither thought or self-consciousness (see P. Harrison, 'Descartes on animals', *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 1992, vol. 42(169), pp. 219–227).
- 7 See especially D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. London: Vintage Books, 1996; D. Abram, op. cit., 2010.
- 8 M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis, 2001(1905); B. Latour, *Politics of Nature: How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004; P. Curry, 'Nature post-nature', *New Formations*, 2008, vol. 26 (Spring), pp. 51–64; D. Abram, op. cit., 2010.
- 9 A. Dobson, 'Democracy and nature: speaking and listening', *Political Studies*, 2010, vol. 58(4), pp. 752–768. Thus Indonesian indigenous narratives tell of 'the falling silent of the world under the burden of "primitive accumulation," of capitalist exploitation, and of colonial administration', A. Franke, 'Animism: notes on an exhibition', *E-flux*, 2012, vol. 36, Available online at: [www.e-flux.com/journal/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/](http://www.e-flux.com/journal/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/) (accessed on 2 January 2013), pp. 12–13, emphasis added.
- 10 M. Weber, 2001(1905), op. cit.
- 11 B. Latour, *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- 12 D. Abram, op. cit., 2010, pp. 46–47.
- 13 Discussed in detail by philosophers M. Hall (*Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany*, New York: Suny Press, 2011) and M. Marder (*Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013). Also see D. Abram, op. cit., 2010, pp. 159–181.
- 14 M. Marder, 2013, op. cit.



- 15 See, for example, M. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- 16 On 'disavowal' see S. Freud, 'Splitting of the ego in the process of defence', pp. 3–6 in Bokanowski, T. and Lewkovitz, S. (eds) *On Freud's 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence'*. London: Karnac Books, 2009(1938); R. Fletcher, 'How I learned to stop worrying and love the market: virtualism, disavowal, and public secrecy in neoliberal environmental conservation', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 2013, vol. 31(5), pp. 796–812; S. Sullivan, 'At the Edinburgh Forums on Natural Capital and Natural Commons: From disavowal to plutonomy, via "natural capital"', 2013a, Available online at: <http://tinyurl.com/oj8l8e6> (accessed on 2 May 2015).
- 17 A. Hornborg, 'Animism, fetishism, and objectivism as strategies for knowing (or not knowing) the world', *Ethnos*, 2006, vol. 71(1), p. 24, after N. Evernden, *The Human Alien: Humankind and Environment*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985, pp. 16–17.
- 18 R. Fletcher, 2013, op. cit.; S. Sullivan, 2013a, op. cit., S. Sullivan, 'After the green rush? Biodiversity offsets, uranium power and the 'calculus of casualties' in greening growth'. *Human Geography*, 2013b, vol. 6(1), pp. 80–101.
- 19 D. Abram, op. cit., 1996, 2010; V. Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London: Routledge, 2006.
- 20 A brief note on terms used here to denote 'nature(s)'. 'More-than-human nature' is advocated by phenomenologist David Abram as a way of overcoming the way that 'nonhuman nature' defines nature-beyond-the-human in a negative sense, i.e. as nature-that-is-not-human (D. Abram, op. cit. ). Abram's intention is to acknowledge that the *human world* is always a subset of the latter, but never the other way around. The human world thus is always 'embedded within, sustained by and thoroughly permeated by, the more-than-human world', while the more-than-human world, although including the human world, and frequently 'profoundly informed by the human world', 'always exceeds the human world' (Abram, D. pers. comm.). I also use the terms 'other-than-human' nature(s) or 'nature-beyond-the-human' (after Kohn, E. *How Forests Think: Towards an Anthropology Beyond the Human*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2013), when referring to organisms, entities and contexts other than the modern common sense understanding of the biological species *Homo sapiens*. At the same time, the situation may be even more complex. This is because in many 'animist' and amodern cultural contexts embodiments other than the modern biological species category of *Homo sapiens* may be perceived ontologically as representing different bodily perspectives – different natures – that nonetheless are embraced by a broader, inclusive category of human persons (see Viveiros de Castro, E. 2004 Exchanging perspectives: the transformation of objects into subjects in Amerindian ontologies. *Common Knowledge* 10(3): 463–484; also S. Sullivan and C. Low, 'Shades of the rainbow serpent? A Khoesan animal between myth and landscape in southern Africa – ethnographic contextualisations of rock art representations', *The Arts*, 2014, vol. 3(2), pp. 215–244). Invoking 'nonhuman' or 'more-than-human' nature in these cultural contexts might thus discount the perceptual and ontological reality guiding understanding and practice in such contexts, in which a greater degree of underlying ontological, communi-



- cative and *cultural* continuity is acknowledged between different embodiments 'in nature' than might be the case in the species thinking informing modern natural science.
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  - 23 After B. Latour, An attempt at a 'compositionist manifesto', *New Literary History*, 2010, vol. 41, pp. 471–490.
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  - 39 M. Foucault, 'The subject and power', *Critical Enquiry* 8(4): 777–795.
  - 40 cf. S. Žižek, 2011, op. cit., p. 282, discussing arguments made by D. Chakrabarty, 2000, op. cit.

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