

Selfhood: A Corporeal Understanding

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Abstract

The theoretical concert of neuroscience, personal narrative, phenomenology, and affect offers critical insight into the primacy of corporeality in comprehending selfhood. I will orchestrate a cross-disciplinary analysis on the theories of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, literary author Siri Hustvedt, and feminist cultural philosophers Elizabeth Grosz and Lisa Blackman, demonstrating the validity of the body's generative function in understanding selfhood. I will identify surprising consonance within these author's disparate methodological standpoints, which are sometimes characterized as oppositional to one another in basic, foundational ways. How do a neuroscientist and a feminist cultural philosopher view the vitality of the body's active and reactive life-forces in a similar manner? Why are body image and body schema deduced comparably by thinkers from phenomenological, affective and neurological perspectives? How do a literary author and cultural philosopher traverse theoretical thresholds in their assessment of the blurred borders between self and other? These questions form the basis of a meaningful dialogue on the relationship between corporeality and selfhood - revealing the permeability of perceived boundaries between body, self, mind, and other.

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This research project will engage in a cross-theoretical analysis of the relationship between corporeality and selfhood. I will examine the significance of the body as the generative arena of selfhood from the following compatible yet distinct methodological works: Lisa Blackman's presentation of affect theory, *Immaterial Bodies*; Antonio Damasio's neuroscientific account, *Self Comes to Mind*; Elizabeth Grosz's cultural philosophical work, *Volatile Bodies, Toward a Corporeal Feminism*; and Siri Hustvedt's personal narrative, *The Shaking Woman or A History of My Nerves*. The theoretical concert of affect, neuroscience, phenomenology, and personal narrative offers critical insight into the primacy of corporeality in conceptualizing the self.

My research reveals unexpected consonance among these disparate methodological standpoints concerning the significance of the body in forming and understanding selfhood. The congruencies among these perspectives underscore the principal validity of a corporeal understanding of selfhood. Positioning the central frameworks of phenomenology, neuroscience, and affect within an interdisciplinary analysis seeks to fill the analytical chasm between neurological and somatic understandings of selfhood. I found the needed bridge across this gap by focusing on how such methodologically diverse conceptions of embodied experience permeate perceived boundaries between body, self, mind, and other.

How do a neuroscientist and a feminist cultural philosopher view the vitality of the body's active and reactive life-forces in a similar manner? Why would a literary author and cultural philosopher cross paths in their assessment of the blurred boundaries between self and other? How are body image and body schema interpreted comparably by theorists from

phenomenological and neurological perspectives? In what way does affect theory, which traverses borders of self, mind, and body, amplify the meaning of neuroscientific and phenomenological theories on corporeal selfhood? These questions form the basis for a meaningful dialogue among these authors.

The central concepts in this cross-methodological conversation are:

I. **Body Image and Body Schema:** these are notions relating the form and perception of the body and self. I will compare Grosz's phenomenological interpretation with Hustvedt's personal narrative. Blackman's affective move to a Body-without-an-Image will offer relevant critique.

II. **Body Mapping and Body Cartography:** Body Mapping presents biological evidence of the body's incubation and evolution of consciousness. Body Cartography differs semantically, but offers a similar projection of selfhood within the body proper. I will compare and contrast Damasio's neuroscientific theory on Body Mapping with the Grosz's phenomenological analysis of Body Cartography.

III. **Sociocultural Homeostasis and Will to Power:** Homeostasis is a biological conception connoting the body's complex life management processes. Will to Power is a Nietzschean theory on the human drive for persistence. I will note the convergences between Damasio's cultural extrapolation on homeostasis in his conception of Sociocultural Homeostasis and Grosz's phenomenological deployment of Will to Power in ascertaining the body's continual expansion of selfhood.

IV. **Body Knowledge and Body Perception:** these are terms I will use to depict consciousness and perceptions of selfhood derived directly from the body's physiological processes. Blackman's affective dissonance moves into theoretical accord in her depiction of the psychological and biological interconnection which produces Body Knowledge. Hustvedt

discusses the production of knowledge through her Body Perception of pain. Grosz's phenomenological tour of the various bodily mechanisms which produce Body Knowledge, selfhood, and even language is bolstered by Damasio's neuroscientific theory on the interdependent cellular universe which orchestrates the conscious self, present both in Body Knowledge and Perception.

V. The Processual Body and Threshold Phenomena: These are conceptual themes developed within Blackman's unique immaterial construal of affect theory. The Processual Body is Blackman's challenge to her interpretation of the misguided neuroscientific notion of a stable, unchanging sense of selfhood. I will engage Blackman's dispute of Damasio's theory on protoself. Blackman posits Threshold Phenomena account for the mutability of borders between self, body, mind, and other. In response, I will examine similar interpretations offered by Hustvedt's personal experience with the foggy borders of self and Grosz's spatialized explanation of the physical parameters of selfhood.

In general, I discovered this intersection of neurobiological, philosophical, and phenomenological theories act to bolster and clarify a comprehension of the corporeality of selfhood. Within this melody of theorists, Lisa Blackman's affective account whistles an intermittent dissonance, challenging some of the overall congruencies. Her immaterial deployment of affect attempts to underscore limitations she finds in neuroscientific and phenomenological explanations of the relationship between the body and selfhood. This provides a depth of interrogation into the theories under analysis.

I wish to make an important clarification on my treatment of the still elusive concept of self. In order to embark on this research exercise effectively, I do not purport to define or invent what I believe to be the self. However, it will be helpful for the purposes of this project to note

that similar value is ascribed to the terms: self, selfhood, personhood, and consciousness, (as it pertains to Damasio). These terms are used cross-theoretically throughout this paper.

I. Body Image and Body Schema

In Siri Hustvedt's narrative journey, *The Shaking Woman or a History of My Nerves*, the reader is swept into the search for de-mystification of her experience with chronic, whole-body seizures. As a literary author, Hustvedt utilizes a non-scientific background to her intellectual advantage. She pursues a disciplinarily unbiased approach to the relationship between the body and selfhood; astutely employing the lenses of neuroscience, phenomenology, and philosophy in a productive synthesis of information.

Navigating the quest for a possible source of her experience with sudden, full-body tremors involves a needed distinction between body schema and body image. At a basic relational level, body schema serves the brain with a diagrammatic representation of the body's structural, postural status. Hustvedt distinguishes this unconscious schematic body awareness from body image, which she notes is an "*interoceptive sense*" (2009, p.50, emphasis in original). Hustvedt's uncontrollable, convulsive bouts motivate reflection on the meaning of her selfhood as a corporeal sensation:

My body image...is conscious – the beliefs and thoughts I have about my physical being...there is a deeply emotional quality to self-recognition as well. Seeing the self has a particular affective resonance, and if that familiar feeling doesn't happen, the reflection loses meaning. (2009, p.50)

Hustvedt refers to the drifting ability to sense her embodied selfhood which caused increasing detachment from her body image. Each seizure episode enforced a collapsed body image, a loss of her sense of self represented by a "lapse in subjectivity, a failure of one aspect of...self-ownership" (Hustvedt, 2009, p. 51).

Elizabeth Grosz examines body image from a philosophical standpoint that underscores

its integrated function as an informant on selfhood, in the inner-dialogue between body and mind. Body image “unifies and coordinates postural, tactile, kinesthetic, and visual sensation so that these are experienced as the sensations of a subject coordinated into a single space; they are the experiences of a single identity” (Grosz, 1994, p. 83). Similar to Hustvedt’s valuation of the quality of connection with subjectivity derived from a coherent body image, Grosz defines body image as a psychical explanation of how the self understands the exterior body as a “differentiated, gridded, ever-changing registration of the degrees of intensity the subject experiences, measuring not only the psychical but also the physiological changes the body undergoes in its day-to-day actions and performances” (1994,p. 83).Grosz confers the foundational significance of body image as an explanation of the corporeality of self. Body image serves to conceptualize the body as a structural, moving scaffold of information on selfhood attesting to “the necessary interconstituency [*sic*] of each for the other, the radical inseparability of biological from psychical elements, the mutual dependence of the psychical and the biological” (Grosz, 1994, p.85).

Stirring scrutiny into such phenomenological and philosophical accounts of the relation between the body and selfhood, Lisa Blackman deploys affect theory which encompasses the “processes of life and vitality which circulate and pass between bodies and which are difficult to capture or study in any conventional methodological sense” (2012, p.4). Blackman suggests the need for a shift from body image to “body-without-an-image in refocusing...attention on bodies as processes” (2012, p.15), rather than fixed, confined entities. Citing the work of affect theorist Mike Featherstone (2010), Blackman notes the need for an examination of body image not solely focused on the human body but rather on: “how people move between different registers, between body-image and body-without-an-image, ‘between the mirror-image and the movement-

image, between affect and emotion, between the subject-object and the sensation of visceral and proprioceptive intensities” (2012, p.15). Hustvedt’s experience floating in and out of a coherent body image falls directly within one of these registers. The invocation of body-without-an-image adds a contrasting dimension to the relation between body and selfhood. In this sense, phenomenological and philosophical accounts of an interior oriented body image are made pliable; stretching across the borders of one’s structural, moving body, toward a seemingly unconfined, affective body image.

II. Body Mapping and Body Cartography

Body mapping is pivotal in neuroscientist Antonio Damasio’s elucidation of the relationship between the body and self. The body is the intra-information segue between internal consciousness and the external environment as Damasio explains, “when the brain maps the world external to the body, it does so thanks to the mediation of the body. When the body interacts with its environment, changes occur in the body’s sensory organs” (2010, p.42). The exterior milieu enters the brain through the body’s sensory organs and is processed and incorporated into the raw components of selfhood, “by mapping its body in an integrated manner, the brain manages to create the critical component of what will become the self” (Damasio, 2010, p.98). Body mapping is defined by the neurobiological mechanism of the brain mapping body states which later become the infrastructure of the self. This theory is therefore a locus for Damasio’s explanation of the development of selfhood. Damasio provides extensive evidence for the neurological processes which underpin body mapping as an indicator of the reciprocal self-producing relationship between the body and brain. The notion that the body yields information on selfhood is delineated precisely through body mapping:

Body mapping of the most refined order undergirds *both* the self process in conscious minds *and* the representations of the world external to the organism. The inner world has

opened the way for our ability to *know* not only that very inner world but also the world around us. (Damasio, 2010, p.114, emphasis in original)

The information pathway mapped within the body produces a dynamic, malleable interrelationship between mind and environment: “Brain maps are mercurial, changing from moment to moment to reflect the changes that are happening in the neurons that feed them, which in turn reflect changes in the interior of our body and in the world around us” (Damasio, 2010, p.71). Damasio views the brain as the mind-making processor of consciousness. The mind is formed as a result of the “brain’s incessant and dynamic mapping” (2010, p.74). Specifically, Damasio believes consciousness arises at the brain-stem level. Two brain-stem nuclei are the site of the earliest notion of feelings, “generated by ongoing life events, which include those described as pain and pleasure” (2010, p. 81). These brain structures chart maps which result in feelings characterized by Damasio as the “primordial constituents of mind, based on direct signaling from the body proper...indispensible components of the self” (2010, p. 81). Further, Damasio illustrates:

These important brain-stem nuclei do not produce mere virtual maps of the body; they produce felt body states. And if pain and pleasure feel like something, these are the structures we first have to thank, along with the motor structure with which they instantly loop back to the body... (2010, p. 81)

Bytes of data are inscribed in the brain with ink produced by the body’s interaction with its environment, “the representation of *the world external to the body can come into the brain only via the body itself*, namely its surface” (Damasio, 2010, p.97, emphasis in original). Bodily changes resulting from this dynamic interplay are charted in the brain. However, Damasio makes clear that while the mind apprehends the outside world through the brain, it is just as true that the brain can only be informed through the body (2010, p.97). The body is the canvas on which the brain paints experience for the mind. Rather than inert flesh, the body orchestrates vibrant

intercourse between mind and world, thus formulating selfhood. Damasio's body mapping theory makes clear the correlation between the body and the development of consciousness. The information mapped into the brain via the body form the building blocks of selfhood. From a biological evolutionary perspective, Damasio traces the origin of selfhood back to its cultivation within such a body, brain, mind, world process:

...the brain developed systems that map stimuli in such detail that the ultimate sequence was images and mind. Eventually the brain added a self process to those minds, and that permitted the creation of novel responses. Finally, in humans, when such conscious minds were organized in collectives of like beings, the creation of cultures became possible along with their attending external artifacts. In turn, cultures have influenced the operation of brains over generations and eventually influenced the evolution of the brain. (2010, p.333)

Perception, or the manner in which the mind discerns it's self as a living organism originates in images of the body charted in the brain. Damasio describes the feelings that constitute the basis for each moment of consciousness and "largely signify aspects of the body state are images as well. Perception in whatever sensory modality, is the result of the brain's cartographic skill" (2010, p.75).

Working through the psychoanalytic lens, Elizabeth Grosz extrapolates Freud's concept of the ego as a marker of selfhood. She accentuates a similar correlation between the ego or inner consciousness, and body images: "The ego then, is something like an internal screen onto which the illuminated projected images of the body's outer surface are directed" (1994, p.37). Grosz views the ego as a focal amalgamation of the body's sensory organs, which produce responses and felt states. Further, she summarizes the ego, or self conscious process as "a mapping of the body's inner surface, the surface of sensations, intensities, and affects, the 'subjective experience' of bodily excitations and sensations" (1994, p.37). These descriptions of an assemblage of neurological processes unified in bodily expression match Damasio's working

definition of the self-as object or the material self which he defines as: “*a dynamic collection of integrated neural processes, centered on the representation of the living body, that finds expression in a dynamic collection of integrated mental processes*” (2010, p.10 emphasis in original).

Grosz conveys the relationship between the body’s exteriority and its psychical interior mediated by the skin. The epidermis forms a physiological chart of selfhood, “the skin and the various sensations which are located at the surface of the body are the most primitive, essential, and constitutive of all sources of sensory stimulation” (Grosz, 1994, p.35). The information from the body’s skin maps reflexive, endogenous and exogenous sensations for the self to interpret, “thus exhibiting the interchangeability of active and passive sensations, of those of subject and object, mind and body” (Grosz, 1994, p.35). Just as Damasio’s body mapping theory conveys, the “brain can be informed only via the body.” (2010, p.97), Grosz’s conception of the skin segue, serves as a kind of “*interface of the inside and outside*” (1994, p. 36, emphasis in original).

Grosz draws from philosophy in navigating a configuration of the body-self-mind relationship which reevaluates the body. She examines philosopher Baruch Spinoza’s monistic view of the body and mind as two, interrelated facets of one being. From Spinoza’s notion of the soul as the “correlate idea of an actually existing body, the degree of sophistication, differentiation, and clarity of the idea is exactly proportionate to the state of the body” (Grosz, 1994, p.12), Grosz reiterates the body’s diagram of a self-making mind, “The mind is the idea of the body to the exact degree that the body is an extension of the mind” (1994, p.12).

In her examination the body’s surface as an exterior expression of internal consciousness, Grosz postulates a cultural perspective to address the body as a social object, “a complex

multifaceted surface folded back on itself...whose incision or inscription produces the (illusion or effects of) depth and interiority” (1994, p. 116). Grosz refers to the metaphysical philosophy of Gilles Deleuze who sought body “cartographies...representations that do something, that refer outside themselves...aspiring to a kind of model of signification, which links the subject’s psyche to signifying chains, to the order of the signifier, that is in which the *body* is the medium of signification” (1994, p.121, emphasis mine). Grosz further points out self-signification is represented in the body as “interactions and linkages...relations occurring on the surface of the skin and various body parts. They are not merely superficial, for they generate, they produce all the effects of a psychical interior, an underlying depth, individuality, or consciousness” (1994, p. 116).

To this point, the methodological frameworks in dialogue could not be on more proximal ends of the intellectual spectrum: Damasio’s vantage point incorporates neurobiological data mapped in the body, as reciprocal, productive means of information on selfhood; Grosz seeks a reconfiguration of the philosophical valuation of the body in understanding subjectivity or selfhood, which takes into account the social and cultural ramifications of the body’s inscriptive surface. However, the conclusions drawn by this neuroscientist and feminist cultural philosopher are analogous: the body maps consciousness and selfhood in an indisputable manner. Selfhood understood corporeally, in both neuroscientific and philosophical terms exceeds perimeters between the body’s exteriority and its environment; weaving within and without the body, brain, and world.

III. Sociocultural Homeostasis and Will to Power

The life management process, or homeostasis, is central to Damasio’s explication of the development of consciousness within the human organism. Homeostasis is defined as the “aim at

maintaining the chemical parameters of a body's interior (its internal milieu) within the magic range compatible with life" (Damasio, 2010, p.45). Damasio expands this simple survival mechanism, on the level of a biological organism, to more complex cultivation of consciousness and personhood. Basic life regulation grows into a deliberate desire for well-being (Damasio, 2010 p.29). This relationship between the advancement of self and an elevated sense of bodily being is drawn together in Damasio's conception of sociocultural homeostasis in which humans moved from "simple regulation, focused on the survival of the organism, to progressively more deliberated regulation, based on a mind equipped with personhood and identity now actively seeking not mere survival but certain ranges of well-being" (2010, p.63).

Grosz reflects upon Nietzsche's philosophical theory of the will to power, a comparable multifaceted, organic drive toward persistence. Grosz quotes a portion of Nietzsche's (1968) will to power in which he defines self as contained definitively in the body: "Behind your thoughts and feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage-whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body" (1994, p.127). Bodily processes produce the effort toward a form of life management which brings about forward movement, a will to live. Grosz emphasizes the body's role in this drive, noting it is "the body, both at an intraorganic or cellular level and as a total, integrated organism, an animal, that is active, the source and site for the will to power and the movement of active (as well as reactive) forces" (1994, p.122). Just as Damasio's notion of sociocultural homeostasis entails a deliberate progress toward well-being, Grosz conveys the will to power as a "drive towards self-expansion, the movement of becoming, for it increases the body's quantity and quality of forces and energies, and drive toward 'vigorous, free, joyful activity'" (1994, p.122). Grosz interprets Nietzsche's notion of the conscious action behind will to power as a direct correlate of the body's biological processes, or

push to persist, “The subject’s psychological interior...can be seen as nothing but the self-inversion of the body’s forces, the displacement of the will to power’s continual self-transformation back onto the body” (1994, p.124). Grosz extends this correlation between the body’s reactive forces for survival, much like Damasio’s homeostatic goal, as the formulary of selfhood, “Consciousness can be regarded as the direct product or effect of reactive forces in the *governance* of the body” (1994, p.124, emphasis mine).

Within the survival or life management spectrum, Damasio articulates an important gradation based on biological value. The quality of survival defined by the form of well-being achieved corresponds with “the physiological state of a living organism’s tissues, within an optimal homeostatic range...the deepest origin of biological value and valuations” (Damasio, 2010, p.51). From a philosophical standpoint, Grosz depicts the body’s role within the will to power, or life regulation as a “multiplicity of competing and conflicting forces which, through the domination of one or a few, comes to have a perspective and position one among a number of competing or complimentary perspectives vying for ascendancy” (1994, p.128). This sentiment may be interpreted directly through Damasio’s discernment of self-oriented life management always coexisting with the “machinery of automated life regulation that any conscious creature inherited from its evolutionary past” (Damasio, 2010, p.62). The body’s evolving system of life regulation is the generative foreground for consciousness according to Damasio. The expansion of homeostasis into sociocultural homeostasis as the organism’s means of life management via the body again underscores the corporeal seat of selfhood:

Conscious reflection and planning of action introduce new possibilities in the governance of life over and above automated homeostasis, in a remarkable *novelty of physiology*...the imagined, dream-of, anticipated well-being has become an active motivator of human action. Sociocultural homeostasis was added as a new functional layer of life management, but biological homeostasis remained. (Damasio, 2010, p.310, emphasis mine)

The drive to persist occurs through the intermingling of bodily selfhood with its environment.

Will to power and sociocultural homeostasis similarly depict a traversal beyond edges of the internal milieu of self into an outward expansion within the world.

IV. Body Knowledge and Body Perception

Siri Hustvedt's account of embodied selfhood is "the narrative of a repeated event, that over time, gained multiple meanings when seen from various perspectives" (2009, p.182). When deciphering the knowledge produced by her bodily tremors, Hustvedt's multi-disciplinary investigation engages the psychoanalytic methodology of Freud. She recognizes Freud's materialist conception of the interconnected processes of the physiological and psychological. In Hustvedt's journey to understand the root of her embodied seizures, for which a psychological source seems ambiguous, she cites her interpretation of Freud's nuanced position on the body mind connection:

He was neither a reductionist nor a dualist: 'The psychic is, therefore, a process parallel to the physiological, a dependent dynamic concomitant'... Freud remained a materialist all his life. He did not truck with misty notions about souls, spirits, or psyches detached from physical processes. One depended on the other (2009, p.17)

Hustvedt quotes George Makari's psychoanalytic analyses of contention by early psychologists and neurologists over the neurobiological connections between brain and self yet to be understood within their disciplines: "One could not glibly say a nerve housed a word or an idea" (2009, p.19). Hustvedt remarked that Freud pondered how this connection might work but was unable to convey any cohesive theory on it during his time (2009, p.19). Similarly, Grosz conveys Nietzsche's interpretation of the corporeality of language. She notes Nietzsche's suggestion that language is at its base corporeal, "Words are doubly metaphorical: they are transcriptions or transpositions of images, which are themselves transpositions of bodily states" (1994, p.126). Grosz extrapolates Nietzsche's idea that bodily forces underlie language and its

potential for representation (1994, p.126). In a way, Hustvedt's mention of the ambiguity in the early psychoanalytic field is answered by Grosz's Nietzsche citation on the corporeal underpinnings of language: "A nerve stimulus, first transposed into an image – first metaphor" (1994, p.126).

Grappling with the question of whether the body harbors consciousness, Hustvedt incorporates the phenomenological perspective of philosopher Shaun Gallagher which consistently underscores the significance of the body's role in conceptions of selfhood. Hustvedt acknowledges Gallagher's argument that:

We have a subjective conscious sense of our freedom to move but that 'the appearances that are arriving are already prefigured. The appearances from dependent systems. Only as dependent on kinesthesia can they continually pass into one another and constitute a unity of one sense.' The conscious is linked to a kinetic/motor bodily unconsciousness. (2009, p.206, Note 98)

Hustvedt's frequent return to this corporeal understanding of selfhood emanates from her personal discovery of self which was altered, shifted and thrown off balance by intractable bouts of bodily seizures. She notes the work of psychological philosopher William James in addressing this notion of a subjective experience which dynamically enfolds the external world with all that entails, the "sights, sounds, smells, sensations, emotions, other people, thought, and language. These are *in us*. We are inhabited, occupied, plural, and always live in relation to that perceived external world as corporeal beings, not just brains" (Hustvedt, 2009, p.90, emphasis in original). Hustvedt conveys the significance of the biological or corporeal reality of human existence, as it is emphasized in the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. She cites his idea of a body as a "thing among things it is caught in the fabric of the world, and its cohesion is that of a thing. But because it moves itself and sees, it holds things in a circle around itself" (2009, p.183). Here again, the interrelatedness of Hustvedt's self among others is brokered directly through the

body.

The personal phenomenology of seizures charted by Hustvedt includes the bodily perception of pain. Existing on “the borderland of Headache [*sic*]” (2010, p.174), most of her life, Hustvedt learns to fully assimilate pain into her sense of self as a means of coping. Training herself to integrate the felt body state of a painful headache into her sense of self ameliorates the physiological affliction, “The headache is me, and understanding this has been my salvation. Perhaps the trick will now be to integrate the shaking woman as well, to acknowledge that she , too, is part of myself” (Hustvedt, 2009, p.174). Perception is not a separate mechanism, extricated from bodily existence, rather it is a corporeal manifestation of consciousness and this is acutely felt in the perception of bodily pain. Hustvedt reflects on her experience with pain based on this awareness:

Pain cannot be separated from our perception of pain, and those perceptions have meanings. Such perceptions involve an individual’s nervous system inside a particular body in relation to a particular environment ...Pain happens within the lived body of a subject, not inside the hypothetical, objective, inert body... (2009, p.180)

In Lisa Blackman’s analysis of the body’s role in affect theory she engages the work of feminist psychologist Elizabeth Wilson. Wilson’s view echoes the biological perspectives of Grosz, Damasio, and Hustvedt. Similar to Hustvedt’s rejection of the body as inert mass, Blackman notes the challenge presented by Wilson’s work against an assumption that biological matter, the body, is a static clump, devoid of psychological substance, “The psychological and biological are not two discrete entities that somehow interact, but enter into relational connections such that they exhibit a ‘relational complexity’ and mutual co-constitution” (2012, p.92). Blackman mentions Wilson’s assertion on the expanse of the nervous system, “well beyond the skull, and as it so travels through the body it takes the psyche with it (2012, p. 93). This is corroborated by Damasio’s view that the neurons that make up the brain and nervous

system are in fact body cells, “neurons are about the body, and this ‘aboutness’, this relentless pointing to the body, is the defining trait of neurons, neuron circuits, and brains” (2010, p.41). As Damasio states, this articulation provides a swift answer to the “mind-body problem”, since brain cells exist and co-function among all other bodily cells (2010, p.41).

Blackman articulates a similar conception crafted by Wilson, of the framework of the brain and nervous system as “both dimorphic and divergent, rather than seeing them as separate entities that somehow interact” (2012, p.93). Blackman acknowledges the significance of Wilson’s understanding that most psychological events are “unconscious or involuntary and do not simply take place in the head but are embodied and enacted throughout the nervous system...the nervous system is psychologically attuned in its relationships to self and other(s)” (Blackman, 2012, p.92). This interrelatedness between the nervous system, body, and self produces bodily knowledge and perception.

Damasio contends that conscious minds arise when a “self process is added onto a basic mind process” (2010, p.8). He asserts the body is the foundation of the conscious mind (2010, p.21), which may be likened to Grosz’s philosophically based conclusion that consciousness “is an effect or consequence of the modulations and impulses of the body” (Grosz, 1994, p.124). Critical to Damasio’s theory of selfhood is its origin in the protoself, which is produced within body mapping structures of the brain. Thus, the protoself, which is the foundation for complex subsequent manifestations of self, is “inextricably *attached* to the body” (Damasio, 2010, p.22, emphasis in original). The protoself, responsible for what Damasio terms primordial feelings, generates basic information on the feeling of being an alive organism. These simple sensations progress into more intricate feelings and emotions or, “complex musical variations on primordial feelings” (Damasio, 2010, p.23). This relationship between the protoself, primordial feelings on

being and the body underscores Damasio's view of the body as undeniably generative of selfhood, "the body is best conceived as the rock on which the protoself is built, while the protoself is the pivot around which the conscious mind turns" (2010, p.22). Damasio's trilogy of conscious selfhood beginning with the protoself, comes to fruition through the later development of the core self and autobiographical self. However, the foundation provided by protoself remains the documentarian of knowledge on the body's existence. From an evolutionary standpoint, consciousness arising from the ability to *know* rather than simply *be*, emerged in stages from "the protoself and its primordial feelings; the action-driven core self; and finally the autobiographical self, which incorporates social and spiritual dimensions" (Damasio, 2010, p.11). For Damasio, what distinguishes a conscious mind is the feeling of knowing, "These feelings accomplish a distinction between self and non self. They are in a nutshell, *feelings of knowing...the construction of a conscious mind depends, at several stages, on the generation of such feelings*" (2010, p.10, emphasis in original). Such fundamental feelings of knowing are derived from the body via the protoself.

Central to Damasio's correlation between the body's processes and the development of selfhood is his belief that the life management, or unconscious homeostatic processes "*precede* the conscious experience of such knowledge...this covert knowledge is quite sophisticated and should not be regarded as primitive. Its complexity is huge and its seeming intelligence remarkable" (2010, p.39, emphasis in original). Nonconscious life monitoring constitutes the layout of beliefs and actions which formulate conscious minds (Damasio, 2010, p.39). Damasio asserts this nonconscious will rumbles through each body cell. He proposes the beautiful metaphor of human consciousness in the form of a gathering of the "inchoate wills of all the cells in our body, a collective voice set free in a song of affirmation" (2010, p.39). This song is unified

within one voice: the self, in a conscious brain (Damasio, 2010, p.39). Therefore, the biological, cellular processes of the body produce the knowledge scaffold of selfhood.

Grosz imbues philosophy with the power to elevate the body into its necessary correlation with selfhood. Philosophy, as a knowledge practice, is a “bodily activity, and is...capable of dynamizing and enhancing life. Philosophy and truth are capable of affirming active power when they, in their turn return power and force to the body from which they derive” (Grosz,1994, p.128). Utilizing the theoretical precepts of Nietzsche, Grosz again makes the connection between the biological processes of the body and the production of knowledge, “The body is the intimate and internal condition of all knowledges, especially of that knowledge which sees itself as a knowledge of knowledges – philosophy” (1994, p.125). From an entirely non-neuroscientific perspective, this underlying view of the body’s ability to know relates strongly with Damasio’s intra-cellular operatic of selfhood; discrete knowledge produced through life management translates into a conscious self. Grosz composes a philosophical standpoint on the biological corporeality of the body, not as an ethereal, inert mass but as a vibrant, generative system: “Bodies construct systems of belief, knowledge, as a consequence of the impulses of their organs and processes” (1994, p.126). According to Grosz, knowledge is produced and contained in the biological body:

Where knowledge exists, it is not a transparent reflection, a meditative proposition, pure ideality, but an ability or resource. It is for this reason that it can be said that the body has a ‘great intelligence’, that muscles, tissues, cells, have knowledge, can remember. (1994, p.127)

Grosz quotes Nietzsche directly in his assertion that the body is: “is a great reason, a plurality with one sense” (1994, p.127). Damasio’s notion of consciousness contained in a unified tonality, uttered by neural cell’s inhabitance throughout the body may be compared with the concept of an embodied soul. Grosz cites Nietzsche’s notion of embodied consciousness in the

form of the soul. Nietzsche (1968) states “the awakened and knowing say: body am I entirely and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body” (1994, p.127).

In these neuroscientific, narrative, philosophical, and affective accounts of body knowledge and perception an unmistakable interrelatedness occurs between the nervous system, body, and self. Knowledge and perception are generated through continual intra-action which intersects the perimeters of selfhood and corporeality.

V. The Processual Body and Threshold Phenomena

Lisa Blackman views the model of positivist, (that which is thought to be scientifically verified through proof or logic), neuroscience as limited in terms of a meaningful conception of embodiment and selfhood. A key concept in her exploration of affect theory’s potential to illuminate a more comprehensive account of the relationality of body and selfhood is the notion of “the one and the many” (2012, p57). Blackman points out the tenuous position of early social sciences on their capacity to conceptualize the transmission of thought, emotion or ideas among individuals in ways which might not be overtly verifiable:

What lay in the background to these concerns, and the concepts that guided their explanations, was both a fascination *with* and attempt to *know* and *understand* experiences that were ephemeral, ‘invisible’, marked by a dissolution of the boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, and human and non-human. (2012, p. 57, emphasis in original)

Blackman presents this historical context for what she terms threshold phenomena; that which permeates the boundaries of material and ethereal, inside and outside, subject and object.

Surmounting the limits of neurological and cognitive sciences may be accomplished in Blackman’s view through an important reformulation of “bodily potentialities as thresholds which require mattering processes to take form. Thresholds introduce leaps, gaps, tensions, ruptures and conflicts to conceptions of change and transformation, avoiding the dangers of

aligning plasticity to flexibility” (2012,p.189).

Blackman implicates Damasio’s theory of the protoself as an invalid explanation for what she contends is the significant presence of affective communication. The process of transmittable, embodied selfhood, or “the one in the many”, may not be adequately explained through what she sees as neuroscience’s faulty assumptions about the brain’s pliancy, “despite synaptic plasticity, what is integral to many neuroscientific theories which work with plasticity is the invocation of some kind of proto-self which is seen to orchestrate coherence” (Blackman, 2012, p.188). Blackman disputes the “mentalist or cognitive conceptions of selfhood which lie in the background orchestrating unity” as inadequately formed (2012, p.188). She characterizes Damasio’s theories on selfhood as menial and associated with what she terms “psychological forms of Darwinism” (2012, p.188).

In Blackman’s examination of affective accounts of embodied selfhood, an important concept within threshold phenomena invokes the mid-nineteenth century notion of the double-brain, or bicameral mind. This concept describes the brain as divided into two functionally separate yet connected hemispheres, thus accounting for extraordinary experiences including hearing voices, telepathy, and madness (Blackman, 2012, p.161). This realm of experience incorporates significant aspects of being which Blackman states enact “bodies as more porous and permeable to others, human and non-human. This view undermines the assumption that there are strict borders and boundaries between mind and body, self and not-self, and the material and ephemeral” (2012, p. 162).

Hustvedt’s exploration through mystical phenomena leads her to remark, the “borders of self we imagine are mutable” (2009, p165). During the most volatile periods of Hustvedt’s encounters with seizures, a bifurcation of self from body ensued, “When the shaking happens,

my narrating first-person subject seems to go in one direction and my recalcitrant body in another” (2009, p.165). Interestingly, Blackman mentions Hustvedt’s narrative, *The Shaking Woman* as an example of the type of experiences which exist within threshold phenomena; not easily pinned down or explicated by neuroscience. Blackman interprets Hustvedt’s account as a reliable corroboration of the view that “contemporary neuroscience is trapped” and incapable of creative conceptions of such threshold embodied experiences (Blackman, 2012, p.170). Blackman does not specify which contemporary neuroscientists she believes Hustvedt is snuffing. However, the affable, cross-disciplinary relationship between Hustvedt and neuroscientist Damasio seems widely known, within scholarly and literary circles. In fact, a recorded interview in 2010 between Hustvedt and Damasio on *Big Think* showcases their mutual intellectual recognition. In their talk, Hustvedt expresses particular interest in the significance of Damasio’s method of examining the trajectory of the unconscious, homeostatic impulse into the development of interrelational, human social behavior (2010, <http://bigthink.com/videos/a-conversation-with-antonio-damasio-and-siri-hustvedt>).

Blackman probes voice-hearing as a component of threshold phenomena to illustrate an embodied selfhood resistant to explanations pertaining to the confines of one organism: “The voice cannot be spatialized or located within the head or mind. Voices are not contained by the boundaries of the skin and the conceptions of interiority that the skin-as-envelope engenders” (2012, p.150). This statement challenges Grosz’ depiction of the self or ego encapsulated in the skin. Blackman describes selfhood expressed through voice-hearing as an example not only of intersubjectivity, but also of “distributed forms of perception and attention...Voices disclose the complex co-constitution of coherence with dissolution, or feelings of not having a clear separation between the inside and outside, self and other, material and sensual” (2012,p.150).

Hustvedt perceives a similar feeling, not in the form of multiple voices, but in the sense of the boundaries of her self being confused or unknown, shaken within the turbulence of seizures. Hustvedt conveys how the outline of her self is subject to fuzziness. She infers that her selfhood both enfolds the external world and moves toward it, and such movement is part of a sense of self that includes others. Hustvedt reflects “ I am not always locked away in the cell of my private, hidden thoughts, and even when I am, large parts of my worlds are closed in with me – chattering multitudes” (2009, p.195). Hustvedt never mentions affect theory in her narrative account. However, the phenomenology she documents corroborates Blackman’s categorization of threshold phenomena.

Grosz defines the parameters of self encompassed in both clear edges of understanding for the human and an awareness of the external influences that enter affectively. She utilizes the term spatiality to underscore the “space surrounding and within the subject’s body... crucial for defining the limits and shape of the body image: the lived spatiality of endogenous sensations” (1994, p.80). Grosz goes on to acknowledge the involvement of what is outside the borders of the physiological body to include the interplay of the “social space of interpersonal relations, and the ‘objective’ or ‘scientific’ space of cultural (including scientific and artistic) representation all play their role” (1994, p. 80).

Blackman is concerned with threshold phenomena; all that cannot be explained by the discrete conceptions of neuroscience, philosophy, or phenomenology. However, her account of experience which traverses the boundaries of embodied selfhood still relies upon the significance of the body; whether confined within one corporeal form, or as “the one in the many.” This is evident in her discussion of the non-western cultural practice of Cambodian Khmer ritual dances, which allowed intergenerational embodied transmission. She categorizes this practice as

threshold phenomena, in which the dancers embody the trauma and death of descendants massacred during the 1960's genocides of the Khmer Rouge. The dance was not simply the expression of an "individual psyche-in-trauma, but rather a form of affective symbiosis which allowed a reaching toward the unrepresentable and unknowable" (Blackman, 2012, p.130). Blackman depicts this bodily experience of selfhood as extra-somatic, where dancers were always "in excess of themselves and importantly communicated with 'others' through the embodied experience of voice hearing." (2012,p.130). This ritual invokes Blackman's notion of affective transfer specifically through the body, "where the 'other' is embodied as a voice or a trace registered corporeally" (2012, p.130).

Blackman insists the self cannot be thought of as a thing or a fixed entity. She contends affective accounts of embodied selfhood are cross-disciplinary, permeating philosophy and neuroscience in order to depict the self as a "process, not an entity, but ...capable of flexible reorganization and conscious discernment or deliberation" (2012, p.117). Yet, Damasio similarly identifies the ever malleable self interacting within the mind, brain, and body: "There is indeed a self, but it is a process, not a thing, and the process is present at all times when we are presumed to be conscious" (2010,p.8).

Blackman contends neurological or other scientific theory cannot effectively record, navigate or decipher affective communication between embodied selves. She believes such connections:

...circulate between the self and other, the human and the non-human, the physical and the ethereal, and which make it difficult to establish borders and boundaries. This does not mean that the subject is a mere node, a lightning conductor for such forces; but rather that these connections and capacities are felt and expressed in registers which might not be easily available for conscious reflection or for academic cartography. (2012, p.120)

Damasio describes his theory of body mapping, as a form of cartography, internally crafted by the body, mind, and self as an information source. The interior milieu of self is cultivated through what might be considered a map derived from affective experiences with the world and others. In a processual manner similar to Blackman's account, Damasio states that body mapping, in its most basic form documents "*both* the self process in conscious minds *and* the representations of the world external to the organism. The inner world has opened the way for our ability to *know* not only that very inner world but also the world around us" (Damasio, 2010,p.114, emphasis in original). Blackman's analysis provides little evidence beyond a blunt rejection of the theories of neuroscientists such as Damasio. In fact, Damasio's understanding of the body's generative forces of the self is preliminary to what occurs extra-bodily, yet it is crucial for understanding all that occurs affectively, outside the borders of one being. Rather than a limitation, his biological summary might be considered an intellectual buttress for an affective refiguring of the body in comprehending selfhood- aptly conveying the permeability of the borders of body, self, brain, and world.

Conclusion

Corporeality is central to all four author's analyses on the formation and understanding of selfhood. In this multidisciplinary analysis, the relationship between selfhood and the body is interpreted through distinct methodological timbres of a congruent chord. While the self may not be easily located or traced, these theorists emphasize the significance of their corporeal tools of navigation. The intersectional examination of Grosz and Hustvedt's philosophical and phenomenological accounts with Damasio's neuroscientific theories merge the rift between neurological and physiological understandings of self. While Blackman's use of affect theory seeks to challenge the limits of such theories, the body maintains a place of primacy in her

approach; reflecting additional ripples of meaning back into such corporeal accounts of selfhood. The significance of corporeality within these methodologically diverse conceptions of selfhood bolsters their shared attempts to convey the permeations of perceived boundaries between the body, self, mind, and other. The findings of this project suggest that although interpretations of selfhood may vary depending on disciplinary pitch, a polyphonic harmony centered on corporeality is clearly audible.

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