

Bodies in Space

Bodies in space.

Think about moving.

Think about moving fast...now faster, slower, and then still. Think about twisting and adjusting to what surrounds you. Think about where you are. You are on a planet in orbit around the sun while your skin cells compensate for degeneration and your whole body depends on defying gravity.

Indeed the whole thing about standing up, being human, depends on defying gravity. That's a body in a space but also on a surface. The body is itself united by a surface, its skin its largest single organ.

We are extensive bodies, an extension which reaches further (goes to greater lengths) at faster speeds nowadays than ever before thanks to contemporary technology, increasing our mobility in social networks and in the process becoming selves that we weren't before. The screen is a space that we look at and within which an incredible amount of spaces can be digitized. We can be visible on our screens and on others at the same time. We can telecommunicate visually online in real time, allowing ourselves to be visible at home and far away when talking on a shared channel.

Also, where are you reading this? On a computer I suspect; on a screen in all probability. You are looking at the screen and you are reading these words. You are in an extensive space; the words on the screen share it with you. It includes your body and the computer. Within one, the electricity that runs through your body and brain (part of the body) and allows you to read the words; within the other the electricity that makes the computer able to make and present the words you're reading. The space to which I just referred runs through and between and around both, the words and the brain jumping across the space. Or is that quite right? When you're reading the words aren't you 'in' their space (the space that makes them possible,) and likewise aren't they 'in' your head the minute you see them, while 'you', somewhere in both places at the time, try to decide what they mean?

To talk about extending the body brings up the question of the tools that the body uses, and which to some extent come to use it. Perhaps, for the sake of what I have to say here, we could agree that there are two ways in which tools are extensions of our bodies. There are prostheses that work only in one direction. With the assistance of a chainsaw I can extend my strength and body out to cut down a tree. With a pen I can write on a page. Additive features such as glasses let me see with a vision that is not what my natural sight has grown to be. Then there are tools whose prosthetic function works in two directions at once, extending the body and at the same time changing it, by working on the inside rather than the surface. Writing, in introducing more and more grammar to language (more and more subtle distinctions between types of space and time, in word between varieties of duration) alters the way we do thought. The computer, uncannily rapid like thinking itself, changes our idea of what the mind is like and how it works. In both cases this happens whether 'I' like it or not. What gets changed by both is what I think 'I' represents, I have the subjectivity I have because I can read, or so I am obliged to think...

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Our bodies are part of this world, and with that, our bodies are in space. I won't say how much, that is incalculable. How much of a fraction of space do I think I take up when I think about how much is out there? And by out there I mean the furthest limits of it all. When I think about it like that, I think that I am hardly any space at all. What if I twirl a hula-hoop while standing on a rubber ball, performing multiple moves at once? Does this do more? Does it fill up more space? How do I think I may make any impact in this incredible dimension of space that we are capable of thinking about if I must also acknowledge that a pea grabs more attention on my kitchen floor than I do in our galaxy? We can spend a lot of time thinking about the greatness of what cannot be seen but in which I can almost certainly say I can feel myself to be in the middle of, leading us both out and into ourselves and what is invisible inside.

I am it happening or this is happening because of me. When converging within another body I as a subject immediately break into two and then not uncommonly three, each of which converge, on my way to developing any kind of converging with the other that started it all. As in, for instance: "I look out my window, and watch her as she goes by. I say to myself, *you're* such a lucky lucky lucky lucky guy". Suddenly I am two, one there to be addressed by the other, both me (or 'I'). And in a flash 'I' realize there's a third, also inseparable from me, entirely a product of 'my' imagination, which it is in charge of: "But it's just my imagination, running away with me. Just my imagination, playing games *again...*" 'It' does it all the time, in other words, to cause 'me' to be what 'I' am, which can only mean that 'I' am a body which is itself the meeting place of at least three, of which one addresses the other while the third jerks them both about, or, better, gives them a reason to be. I come divided up and without a manageable center of control. It's much more a matter of a dialog pulled along by the non-verbal. That's me in space, a thinking and at the same time unthinking body. Narcissistically, I suspect all the other bodies with which I converge or as completely incomplete as I am, otherwise I'd have to suppose they were all where they are meant to be. There'd be no randomness, without which it's impossible to imagine order of any sort, and it's the latter that tends to structure the imagination in the first place—as in a subject/object relationship set off by looking out one's window and then finding oneself (as first person pronoun) speaking to oneself (as second person pronoun)...

Pronouns are shifters, they move from subject to subject standing in for all of them and belonging to none, she stood there while she stood there... each a different she and each she in her own space, distinguished from one another only by location in fact...

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A body is made up of spaces, which are themselves made of many spaces. One might even say that human and all other physical bodies are made of objectively tiny bodies in a subjectively infinite or at least immeasurable space. Kenneth Price, master of tiny sculpture, just died and I heard that someone got him going in an interview about how it was that he had been overlooked because he made works which were small when everyone knows that important works are always large, and he said something like (I don't have the exact quote) "Small is the most enormous thing there is". I've learned since that it was a quote from Joseph Cornell, whose work was not as small as the best of Kenneth Price...

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I'll suggest, then, this: one may talk of a body being made of spaces but not of space being made of bodies. Also (following Deleuze, more or less) any convergence of bodies or parts of bodies makes a new body. (Deleuze defines a body as an array of forces working together, an anatomical body in this no more or less complete than, for example, a language.)

Which makes me think about our theme with this in mind, when we talk about bodies in space, what are they doing? For one thing slow repetition above, for sure, but the constant production of the irreversible down where we are. So another question follows, maybe: does this constantly change the space or is it just the bodies that change? Obviously not. To mention that space in which we are and from which we are simultaneously for the most part quite distant, I have no sense at all, from minute to minute, of what's going on inside any part of my body, let alone what it looks like, and that's just as well. I am quite sure, however, that my sense of my body as a body is not the one I'd have had five hundred years ago. Likewise, surely, with the space it's in. For example and most obviously, I can't even see space without having to untangle it from a photographic version of itself, or from my involuntary tendency to adjust it to it, perhaps. They didn't have that problem five hundred years ago. Other things had saturated their perception and separated them from direct experience, whatever or however that might (at any given time) have been conceived.

Some say we are separated from direct experience with the everyday because of increased interaction with the computer, but that surely is an old thought by now. The computer is the everyday. My connection with it runs from touch to vision. I touch it with the bottom of my palms resting on the laptop, my fingers on the keyboard of signs, my eyes observing and directing. There is almost no resistance, and sometimes a total flow when the words move across the screen as my fingers do on the keyboard. My fingers move around like a draughtsman directing a sketch of a building by playing a piano. The movement of the keyboard is also a movement left to right with text on a screen. A key is a thing and a sign at the same time. The movement on the keyboard clicks, making silent words between ourselves and our bodies which we don't quite think of as ourselves while knowing them to be the absolute physical limit of ourselves, which we think the world and hear our own voices or the voices of others as we do so.

I can be an avatar in cyberspace, and this cyber space could be imagined to be as empty and full as space itself, we would just have to think about how to simulate it. I was once at a dance recital and afterward was introduced to my friend's new boyfriend, a scientist working on a project to extract and study liquid from one of Jupiter's moons. I do not know much about space, but thought to ask about something I had heard about the limits of it. I asked him if there was an end to space, and if what surrounds it is called non-space? He said yes, non-space is outside space. Space has an edge of light. He then told me that the universe is a hyper-sphere and the galaxies are drains, or at least this is how we can think about it. Light in the universe is constantly moving around the hyper-sphere and its being pulled through drains. We do not see all the sky lit up because we are looking up and we are seeing non-space and light thrown around in a hyper-sphere too large to measure. We are a fleck in atmospheres of light, on a planet of planet-like orbs scattered and spinning around like mobiles within forces gravitating towards one another, seen through beams of light visible or nearly transparent, light years away but here all at once, moving in all directions and turning on and off with the explosion or burnout of a star. We twirl and float in it all. Balancing like a

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girl with a hula hoop on a large rubber ball, except that she could fall and get up with causing the eternal destruction of life as we know it.

And so the vision of space that I was informed of by a scientist who studies Jupiter's moons can be interpreted onscreen, and I can run around in it, in its definitions and equations and graphic representations. Moving my fingers on the keyboards around on the keyboard, while at the same time smelling a freshly baked slice of bread sitting on the desk beside me waiting for the moment I take a break from the computer to settle my hunger. I am, as I do so, suspended between a variety of abstractions and the entirely physical, albeit only at that moment olfactory, sensory excitement provided by the smell of toast. I take this enormous disparity for granted, just as I take for granted that my body is a combination of wet and dry, soft and hard, made of movements of which I am conscious and from movements of which I cannot possibly be conscious, suspended halfway between the atom and the limits of the universe.

The fastest speeds that bodies achieve are the ones we can't see, and the smallest similarly invisible, and when the smallest is the fastest it can go anywhere. It can go so something so as small as to be only felt, that is it can go to sensation and to thinking. Made me think that you can blow everything up with dynamite except the atom, which takes a very deal more just to split. Tough little mother that atom... kind of elemental as you might say....

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In conclusion, I cannot experience myself as a space. I can't think about space with space, either, in the conventional sense of 'thinking'. I'd argue that that's what painters do, but that's because painters can't only think about it quantitatively. Mostly I can only think of space with what it's not, for example the grid, whether in my paintings the affine grid that measures and generates movement at the same time, or the grid made out of horizontals and verticals, where spaces are at once contained and turned into depths, every repetition announcing a difference, every difference held in place (or not) by the other differences. Neither kind of grid is actually to be found in space; it's like language being unable to explain its own ground.

Exit Velocity Faster than the Speed of Light is the title of a painting made by the collaborative between two conversions—each with an 'I' made up it turns out also of a 'me' and an imagination they both share—that is the collective subjectivity that is the 'I' that has written this essay, and the painting's title refers to a description of how to account for us not being able to see black holes, rather we see the halos of light produced around them. The title can just as well describe thought or anything else reminiscent of our model for immediacy, which is the electronic. Of which we may also say that one cannot only not see it, but you can't separate it into bodies and space either.

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