

LUCAS CONFERENCE 2021

# BODIES MATTER



15-16 APRIL 2021



Universiteit  
Leiden

Centre for the Arts  
in Society

# **Bodies Matter**

## **LUCAS Conference 2021**

### **Thursday 15 April 2021**

9:10 – 9:20	Introduction and practicalities by Conference Committee
9:20 – 9:30	Welcome by Sybille Lammes (Academic Director LUCAS)
9:30 – 10:30	<b>Keynote Elleke Boehmer (Oxford University)</b>
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee/Tea Break
11:00 – 11:50	<b>PANEL 1: SKIN AND SURFACE</b>
11:00 – 11:15	<b>Helen Westgeest (Leiden University)</b> ‘Parasitism’ as critical concept in Tau Lewis’s Flesh-Tone Mask to discuss skin tone bias
11:15 – 11:30	<b>Glyn Muijtens (Leiden University)</b> Defining skin: A lexical approach to the ancient Greek body
11:30 – 11:50	<b>Discussion</b>
11:50 – 13:00	Lunch
13:00 – 13:50	<b>PANEL 2: BODIES OUT OF PLACE</b>
13:00 – 13:15	<b>Juliane Röleke (Humboldt University Berlin)</b> Mother Ireland and her “Soldier Dolls”: Republican Paramilitary “Punishment” Attacks and the Female Body in Northern Ireland 1971 – 1979
13:15 – 13:30	<b>Mireia Pérez-Carretero &amp; Jordi Serrano-Muñoz (National Autonomous University of México &amp; Colegio de México)</b> Transmutation of the disappeared body: Representations of the Ayotzinapa missing students in the press and literature
13:30 – 13:50	<b>Discussion</b>
13:50 – 14:10	Coffee/Tea Break
14:10 – 15:00	<b>PANEL 3: CHALLENGING NORMS</b>
14:10 – 14:25	<b>Andries Hiskes (Leiden University)</b> Caesural cuts: objectification and bodily autonomy of the disabled and self-harming body in <i>A Little Life</i>
14:25 – 14:40	<b>Isabel Fontbona Mola (University of Girona)</b> Destroying the binary materiality while rewriting bodies through bodybuilding
14:40 – 15:00	<b>Discussion</b>

## **Friday 16 April 2021**

9:00 – 9:10

Welcome by Conference Committee

9:10 – 10:00

**Keynote Willemijn Ruberg (Utrecht University)**

10:00 – 10:30

Coffee/Tea Break

10:30 – 11:20

### **PANEL 4: BODY IN COMMUNITY**

10:30 – 10:45

**Ohad Ben Shimon (The Hague University of Applied Sciences, Utrecht University)**

A living community: Theorizing immunity from the autoimmune

10:45 – 11:00

**Shiyu Gao (University of Edinburgh)**

Reshaping the technological body in the COVID-19 pandemic

11:00 – 11:20

**Discussion**

11:20 – 12:30

Lunch

12:30 – 13:20

### **PANEL 5: COLONIAL BODIES**

12:30 – 12:45

**Patrícia Martins Marcos (University of California, San Diego)**

Naturalizing bodily bondage: Skin color, corporeal complexion, and the anatomy of race in the Portuguese Atlantic

12:45 – 13:00

**Ana Nenadovic (Freie Universität Berlin)**

Queering the unity of mind and body: Akwaeke Emezi's Freshwater and Rita Indiana's Tentacle

13:00 – 13:20

**Discussion**

13:20 – 13:40

Coffee/Tea Break

13:40 – 14:30

### **PANEL 6: RESISTANT BODIES**

13:40 – 13:55

**Franziska Haug (Goethe-University Frankfurt am Main)**

'I am afraid. I am female, I am male, double': The materialization of queer bodies in capitalist times

13:55 – 14:10

**Martin Beck (Universität der Künste Berlin)**

'Irruption of the Corporeal': On the aesthetics and politics of abjection in post-digital video art

14:10 – 14:30

**Discussion**

14:30 – 15:30

**Concluding Remarks**

**Frans-Willem Korsten (Leiden University)**

## Abstracts

### Keynotes

**Elleke Boehmer**

**Queer and decadent bodies in Louis Couperus and Sarojini Naidu, 1890s**

The paper will explore the evocation of the Eastern body, whether supine or in movement, in two writers of the 1890s or fin de siècle, the Dutch colonial author Louis Couperus, in particular his 1900 novel *De Stille Kracht* (The Hidden Force) and the Indian English poet, Sarojini Naidu, especially her *The Golden Threshold* poems, some of which were first published in the 1890s (most notably in the *Savoy* magazine). Of special interest will be the ways in which the writers use the sinuous, desiring body, whether male or female, though mostly female or effeminate, to convey queer and anti-colonial meanings, even while seeming to uphold the Oriental and colonial status quo, whether in India or in the Dutch East Indies. The paper will suggest that the Eastern or Oriental settings allow them to give wider scope to decadent experimentation than permitted at the time in the more controlled and controlling European context.

**Willemijn Ruberg**

**Forensic bodies: bodily (in)violability in modern criminal investigation**

During criminal trials, bodies have been examined for centuries. Corpses testified to causes of death; live bodies of perpetrators and victims were searched for trace evidence. Bodies of suspects were examined by doctors and later psychiatrists for indicators of insanity or degeneration. In modernity the right to bodily integrity has increasingly been emphasized in law and arguably in the practice of forensic science. This paper will explore the relationship between the knowledge practices of scientific experts, who assert claims to examine the body, and the right to the inviolability of the body. It will delve into techniques of making knowledge of the body in the modern history of forensic science, medicine and psychiatry, varying from reading the face for signs of degeneration, feeling the body to search for hysterical pressure points, touching the body to look for evidence of rape, and the use of DNA as a tool of criminal investigation. It will address the shifting boundaries between expert knowledge practices and the (gendered) body.

## PANEL 1

**Helen Westgeest**

**‘Parasitism’ as critical concept in Tau Lewis’s *Flesh-Tone Mask* to discuss skin tone bias**

Skin tone bias or ‘colorism’ is a topical issue in socio-political debates in multi-ethnic societies. Though usually debated verbally, this problem is grounded in visual perception, an issue addressed by a number of contemporary artists. This paper focuses on the installation work *Flesh-tone Mask* (2016) by the Jamaican-Canadian artist Tau Lewis. Three pale-coloured silicone masks are hanging on hooks on a clothes rack; next to it, a video shows the artist who covers her body with the torso-shaped pink mask. She explains that the chalk pastels used to colour the masks belonged to three different brands, and were all labeled either ‘skin-tone’ or ‘flesh-tone.’ This paper explores how the concept of ‘parasitism’ in the applied media (i.e. how video’s insufficiency parasitizes on the surfaces of the physical masks) acts as a metaphor for how the ‘insufficient’ considered as black woman ‘parasitizes’ on the appropriated pale skin, while evoking an embodied ‘skin-awareness’ in the spectator. The

argument will be grounded in theories of haptic visuality. In these studies, terms such as flesh (adopted from Merleau-Ponty) and skin play a central role.

**Glyn Muijtens**

**Defining skin: A lexical approach to the ancient Greek body**

Whereas we make do with a single word, ancient Greek contained many terms we might translate as 'skin.' One might therefore wonder how these words differ in meaning. In my paper, I focus on two of these 'skin' terms: *khros* (χρῶς) and *derma* (δέρμα). By analysing their uses in several passages from Greek literature, I demonstrate that these terms are founded on different conceptions of the body in its relation to the surrounding world: while *khros* implies an 'open' body, *derma* represents a body 'closed off' from the world. Next, I consider two instances in which *derma* is used where, based on my earlier analysis, we might rather expect *khros*: for the skin of punished slaves in Aristophanes, and as the common term for human skin in the Hippocratic corpus. I suggest these authors strategically defy the regular use of these words, and consider reasons for this deviation. Thinking about skin terminology in this way reveals competing constructions not only of the skin, but of the body as a whole in ancient Greece: much like it does now, skin mattered in antiquity.

**PANEL 2**

**Juliane Röleke**

**Mother Ireland and her "Soldier Dolls": Republican Paramilitary "Punishment" Attacks and the Female Body in Northern Ireland 1971 – 1979**

The body has to be understood as a central means of political communication during the conflict in Northern Ireland between 1969 and 1998. Through a systematic analysis of "punishment" attacks carried out by Republican paramilitaries on Catholic women in the 1970s, the lecture demonstrates how the female body became a visible transmitter of gendered social and political norms within local communities. Shortly after the outbreak of the conflict, paramilitary groups took over judicial and executive tasks in many neighbourhoods and carried out various "punishments". The public shaming of women by groups like the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA) and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) was specific for Catholic communities and could include for example forced haircuttings, beatings, shavings and tarring and feathering. The lecture examines the logic of these attacks and the influence of gender on their justification, their specific physical form, and the presentation of the attacked women, who were staged as embodiments of female deviant behaviour.

**Jordi Serrano-Muñoz & Mireia Pérez-Carretero**

**Transmutation of the disappeared body: Representations of the Ayotzinapa missing students in the press and literature**

A body gone, a community that refuses to let go. As Gabriel Gatti theorized, the victims of violent disappearances are suspended in a limbo of representation. How do we speak of and illustrate a vanished body, a life halted without conclusion? We will reflect on the way bodies of missing persons have been represented in literature and the press. We will focus on the forced disappearance of forty-three students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College, Mexico, in 2014. We argue that one of the most significant approaches to the impossible task of representing a missing person has been mediated through the idea of the transmutation of the body. We will pay attention to two particular instances. First, we will analyze how the media has depicted the missing students through their families, whose



practice of waving and wearing enlarged images of them in every public appearance epitomized the magnitude of forced disappearances in Mexico. Second, we will see how Tryno Maldonado bridged this challenge in *Ayotzinapa: The Face of the Disappeared*. He reenacted in this literary work a fictionalized portrayal of the lives of the students based on real interviews with their peers, friends, and family members. Denied the materiality of a physical figure that has vanished, the identity of the missing students is embodied instead by members of their communities in a struggle for justice and against oblivion.

## PANEL 3

**Andries Hiskes**

### **Caesural cuts: Objectification and bodily autonomy of the disabled and self-harming body in *A Little Life***

Hanya Yanagihara's novel *A Little Life* (2015) follows the lives of four friends, one of whom, Jude, is disabled. In the course of the novel, the reader slowly learns how Jude's body has been sexually and physically abused in his past, which leads him to start cutting himself. In this presentation, I trace how Jude's disabled body becomes a space for contesting its use. Jude's friends and (adopted) family, as well as his many abusers, all attribute different purposes to his body; either as a body that should try to be healthy, or, through acts of objectification, as a body that is available to be maltreated. Objectification, however, presupposes instrumentalizing the body toward some end. I argue that the novel allows us to consider how self-harm can be concurrently interpreted as damaging and further disabling the body, as well as being an act of bodily autonomy. Furthermore, I will argue how this duality of self-harm has a parallel in the way the novel's characters are unable to speak or talk about self-harm in the form of the caesura—formal breaks in the novel's lines and sentences.

**Isabel Fontbona Mola**

### **Destroying the binary materiality while rewriting bodies through bodybuilding**

The proposal pretends to present a peculiar approach to escaping from the dual-gender conception. We will carry out this breakup through the sports activity, focusing on the bodybuilding frame. The main point of this lecture lies in shattering the gender stereotype by means of the body modification carried out through bodybuilding, being critical of the suffocating regulations that these bodies have to meet when they are assessed on stage. We will point out the female and genderqueer bodybuilders as the basis of this lecture, in order to debate if this new corporeal identity built through muscles allow a split in the gender discourse and in the expectations that it generates to be created. In any case, the "sport" competition is not a valid tool, as the same competitive regulations establish some limitations, but in an opposite way, art it is. We will focus on the context of art through female artists or transgender artists who have used this discipline to modify their bodies, and by doing so, have managed to give a stronger message than in the field of competition.

## PANEL 4

**Ohad Ben Shimon**

### **A living community: Theorizing immunity from the autoimmune**

This article proposes a theorization of immunity from an embodied autoimmune perspective. Arguing through what it identifies as the limitations in current clinical immunology explanations and politico-

philosophical theories of immunity, the author asks to embody, rather than metaphorize, the theoretical stakes of current immune theory. As a counterargument to dominant theorizations of immunity that pathologize or metaphorize the autoimmune bodily experience, it seeks to forward a more spacious, material and affirmative theorization of the body. As the author supplements existing immune theory with their own emergent and embodied theory, they develop an autoimmune methodology based on their experience of living with an autoimmune disease. Part personal narrative, part speculative autoimmune theory, the article ultimately calls for a practice of self-care aimed at coming to tolerate the disagreeing community of the autoimmune body, as it challenges normalized notions of what self and other, immunity and community, ease and disease mean.

**Shiyu Gao**

### **Reshaping the technological body in the COVID-19 pandemic**

With the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, much of the world has been experiencing isolation and quarantine. Digital technology, especially the Internet, has become the essential method of communication. It leads to an infrastructural digitalisation to almost every aspect of ordinary life, such as online exhibitions, video conferences, and remote work. During the quarantine, common life with increasing reliance on digital technology seems to contribute to a posthuman world as N. Katherine Hayles discusses ‘... that machines can, for all practical purposes, become human beings. You are the cyborg, and the cyborg is you.’ The paper intends to investigate how contemporary Chinese artists utilise digital media to reflect on the body reliant on machines and digital technologies in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper will take the art piece Human Machine Reverse Motion Capture Project (2020) created by multimedia artist Lu Yang as the case study. The artist had planned to debut the artwork at the Art Basel Hong Kong cancelled due to the COVID-19 outbreak in March. In her creation, Lu employs motion-capture devices to collect subtle body movements of traditional Balinese and contemporary dance practices from Indonesia, India, and Japan. By using robotic technologies, Lu re-presents bodily actions to visualise the posthuman subject engaging with machines. With the close analysis of Lu’s artwork, the paper will argue how a new subjectivity emerges and the material interaction between embodied humans and digital technologies as N. Katherine Hayles reasserts within the current COVID-19 pandemic society.

## **PANEL 5**

**Patrícia Martins Marcos**

### **Naturalizing bodily bondage: Skin color, corporeal complexion, and the anatomy of race in the Portuguese Atlantic**

In this paper I argue that the body of the enslaved person was the first to be understood in the physicalist and reductive terms of modern medical science. This paper centers the biopolitical space of the plantation (fazenda or engenho) in Brazil as a landscape of elided humanity. While the sustenance, prosperity, and expansion of empire was inconceivable without the corporal sacrifice of the enslaved, ultimately these were also denied lives. Unlike Portuguese or indigenous vassals, the enslaved could never become subjects, but only individually commodified bodies since, unlike the vassal, the slave was unmoored from any family or community. Thus, not only were slaves unable to define how, where and with whom to live, they were valorized simply as discrete bodily commodities: at the slave auction site, individual value was contingent upon the evaluation of physical prowess, signs of disciplinary intervention, and the presence of bodily marks. At the plantation, on the other hand, the enslaved sustained value through corporal labor, and as managerial accounting units subject calculation, quantification, and classification. In the 1780s, Linnaean natural philosophy and modern

medicine tethered distinctions in human kinds to the physical body. Based on the belief that different bodies survived and thrived in disparate climates and geographies, new imperial labor regimes emerged: while civilized white bodies, and the nearly disappearing docile bodies of Amerindians were intended for higher altitudes and temperate climates; the robust savagery of black bodies suited them to the living and labor conditions of the torrid Brazilian plains.

**Ana Nenadović**

**Queering the unity of mind and body: Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* and Rita Indiana's *Tentacle***

The unity of mind and body and the influences of one's health on the other have been relevant issues in philosophy and medicine as well as in literature for a considerable time. In Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018), and Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* (Sp. *La mucama de Ominculé*) (2015) these topics are reflected and deconstructed from a queer and postcolonial perspective. In both novels, spirits inhabit the protagonists' minds, which, ultimately, guide the human protagonists through their transitions from female to non-binary or male bodies. The spirits living in Ada (*Freshwater*) and Alcide (*Tentacle*) detach the human minds from their bodies in order to move them between places, times, and corporeal frames. This presentation aims to analyse how the two novels break the unity of mind and body on the levels of both content and form. Furthermore, the presentation's objective is to examine in which ways this rupture contributes to contemporary understandings of queer identities in literature. The comparative analysis of novels by an African (Nigerian) and a Caribbean (Dominican) writer opens, additionally, spaces for considerations of common characteristics which might be regarded as post/decolonial, contributing thus to the decolonisation of queer studies.

**PANEL 6**

**Franziska Haug**

**'I am afraid. I am female, I am male, double': The materialization of queer bodies in capitalist times**

In opposition to the accusations made against Judith Butler when her book *Gender Trouble* was published in 1990 that she would declare the body to be a mere discursive sign or that she destroyed all somata of living subjects with the principle of deconstructing biological sex, in *Bodies That Matter* she proposes a '[...] return to the notion of matter not as site or a surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter.' In this sense, the focus of the lecture is not on the investigation of the ontological or phenomenological status of the materiality of the body, but rather on the question of how it is produced. The (gendered) body is understood as being constituted, mediated and produced by material, historical practices and not taken for granted. The analysis of the production of the sexual body is linked to Karl Marx's concept of work in order to prove the thesis that pro- and reproductive work is needed to produce a (sexual/gendered) body. This theoretical analysis will be demonstrated using literary examples of queer-materialist German literature (e.g. Ronald M. Schernikau) in order to propose a mediation of queer and historical-materialist approaches.

**Martin Beck**

**'Irruption of the corporeal': On the aesthetics and politics of abjection in post-digital video art**

Digital technologies have reconfigured our corporeality by increasingly penetrating its biological matrix as well as by producing new artificial techno- and image-bodies. A chief interest of so-called 'post-digital' or 'post-internet' has been the exploration of these new configurations of analog and



digital, based on the assumption of their inextricable entanglement. While these artistic positions have turned to the body and embodiment as one of their focus points, interestingly. The corporeal is often featured in the mode of the abject, an expelled and repulsive materiality that is formless and defies an integration into the registers of the imaginary and the symbolic. This seems to point to an antagonism or resistance to digitally optimized bodies and body images as well as to a paradigm of free flow of information in general. With regard to abjection in the art of the 1990s, Frieze thus spoke of a “return of the abject” or a “new abject” in 2016. The goal of my talk is to explore this notion of a digital abject in the realm of the digital image, drawing on artistic positions such as Sondra Perry, Ed Atkins, Laure Prouvost and Jon Rafman. A key feature of the notion of the ‘digital abject’ is the way that it links a general dialectic of physical and virtual, analog and digital to the question of success and failure of individual and collective processes of subjectification. The relationship of bodies and media thereby sheds light onto the political crises of the present and the options for agency within them.