re:skin

edited by Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth

ARTECA
From the MIT Press

This book was set in Janson and Rotis by Graphic Composition, Inc. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Re : skin / edited by Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth.
p. cm.
ISBN-13: 978-0-262-06260-2 (alk. paper)
ISBN:10: 0-262-06260-7 (alk. paper)
1. Skin—Fiction. 2. American fiction—21st century. 3. Canadian fiction—21st century. 4. Skin—Psychological aspects. I. Flanagan, Mary, 1969– II. Booth, Austin.
PS648.S5R4 2007
813'.609353—dc22

2006056675

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

| 4 |

MAKING ROOM FOR THE BODY: FROM FRAGMENTATION TO MEDIATION

Bernadette Wegenstein

the internal nothingness
of my self

which is night,
nothingness,
thoughtlessness,

but which is explosive affirmation
that there is
something
to make room for:
the body.

—Antonin Artaud, "To Have Done with the Judgment of God, A Radio Play"

It is not an exaggeration to say that over the last decades the study of the body has dominated many critical disciplines in the humanities, to the extent that a new discipline has arisen: that of *body criticism*. This chapter investigates how this new discipline was constituted throughout the last century; the epistemological pillars on which it rests; and the concrete embodiments of its current expression, from fragmented "skin-suits" to holistic "digital-organic video and sound environments" and "smart weather" architecture.

According to French historian Bernard Andrieu, the twentieth century has been characterized by an "epistemological dispersion of the human body" (1993, 9; my translation). Andrieu points out that only since the development of new historiographical approaches and methods by the Nouvelle Histoire (New History)[1] did the body become an object of focused investigation in the middle of the twentieth century. In the introduction to his *Feudal Society* (1949), Marc Bloch[2]—one of the co-founders of the new historian journal *Annales*—wrote that "the task of the historian is not to exhibit an uninterrupted chain of connections linking the patterns of the past . . . but rather to

understand the infinite variety and richness of the past in all its combinations" (qtd. in Revel 1995, 18). It is in this spirit that, during the New History movement of the 1970s, medievalist Jacques Le Goff suggested rewriting history with a small *h*, as a history *lived by people* (1978, 241). This perspective emphasized historical realities; one of the key elements was to discover and unfold the connections among historical events, their context, and the materiality under investigation. No entity would offer itself more readily to this new historical approach than the human body. As British sociologist Bryan S. Turner states, the usefulness of the body to critical analysis lies in the fact that the body is a material organism at the same time as it is a metaphor: "The body is at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing—a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity" ([1984] 1996, 7–8).

The dispersion of the body throughout the twentieth century and the resulting development of cross-disciplinary approaches to critically studying the body are crucially related to the redefinition of the body and its functions in several areas of research. This chapter investigates how an epistemological shift occurred over the last century that opened up new and old interests in the body. This shift was primarily the result of corporeal theories emerging from psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and cognitive science.[3] The influence of these fields, moreover, has not only been felt—as it so evidently has—in contemporary intellectual movements such as gender studies, but has also affected the artistic practices of performing the body in the booming realm of contemporary media art and in architecture as well. I demonstrate this influence at the end of the chapter by way of three examples from media art and architecture.

It goes without saying, however, that body criticism did not emerge ex nihilo in twentieth-century thought. There is a long history of thinking about the body—one as long as bodies have existed. Nevertheless, a crucial moment for the transformation of the body concept from a more unified perception of the body to a body in pieces was high modernity (i.e., eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries). Modernity constitutes, according to Turner, the beginning of a "somatic society"—namely, a society in which major political and moral problems are both articulated with respect to the body and expressed through it ([1984] 1996, 8).

In the aftermath of high modernity, the health, hygiene, shape, and appearance of the body have become among the most important expressions of an individual's identity (Giddens 1990). This bourgeois body has become an individual property and a personal construction, and conflicts that used to occur between medieval bodies now take place within modernity's embodied and self-aware individual.

In her study of eighteenth-century German physician Johann Storch, and his reports on the medical history of 1,800 women of all ages in Eisenach, Germany, Barbara

Duden identifies a "new kind of discrete object" that the modern body has constituted since the late 1900s: "This isolated, objectified, material body was seized by a dissecting gaze that embraced not only the entire body, not only its surfaces, but also its recesses and orifices. It penetrated inquisitively into the inside, evaluating the palpated organs and relating them to a visual image of organs and cadavers. This gaze turned the body, and with it the patient who possessed it, into a new kind of discrete object" (1991, 4). It is not until the end of the nineteenth century that an alternative to the objectification of the body appears, at which time the early modern body-in-pieces begins to be integrated into a holistic body concept derived largely from developments in the realms of psychoanalysis, phenomenology, and cognitive science. This new body concept reveals the history of the body to be, in fact, a history of mediation. As I demonstrate in examples from media art and architecture, the discourse of holism has replaced the discourse of fragmentation, while incorporating key aspects of the dispersed body. Thus, I suggest we think of the history of the body as a history of constitutive mediation, for which both fragmentation and holism are indispensable modes of imagining and configuring the body. Nevertheless, it is thanks to the strategies of new media, which are incorporated and often the basis of the art installations in question, that the body was able to show its "real face": mediality.

Before analyzing the media art and architecture pieces, however, I want to show how and why the specific fields of psychoanalysis and phenomenology and their definitions or approaches to the body have helped fundamentally to formulate and carry out the struggling dialogue between a holistic and a fragmented body concept. The examples from contemporary media art and architecture serve to show how these underlying philosophical structures have influenced the display and performance of the millennial body in question—from a body in pieces as suggested in the feminist critique *Hautnah* (1995) by Alba D'Urbano, to a holistic "body house" as proposed by architects Diller + Scofidio in *Blur* (2002), as well as to digitally enhanced organic spaces such as media artists Aziz + Cucher's latest installation *Synaptic Bliss* (2004).[4]

Psychoanalysis

The main impulse behind the psychological discussion of the body in the twentieth century was the invention of psychoanalysis early in the century, and the resulting increase in medical consideration given to sexuality in understanding the human psyche.[5] Through psychoanalysis, the body has become more objectified and more often diagnosed as a psychological entity. The key concept in this regard is the *image* of the body produced by the body itself (autoperception), and hence the immediate perception of the world through one's own skin, the "moi-peau" (Anzieu 1995).

Psychoanalysis is less interested in the actual body than in the body image *(image du corps)*, which is considered as *representations*, that is, as constructions, that depend on how they are apprehended in external and social relations—an image according to which the subject is created by its perception of and by the outer world. The recognition of one's self in the gaze of the other is among the most fundamental concepts for understanding the meaning of subjectivity in the twentieth century.[6] Freud defined the ego as a corporeal projection, arguing that "the ego does not result from a preordained biological order, but is the result of a psychosocial intervention into the child's hitherto natural development" (qtd. in Grosz 1995, 185). Basing his psychoanalytical insights on Freud's ego-theory, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan argued in "Le stade du miroir" ([The Mirror Stage])[7] that the only way we can perceive our bodily selves is through a deceptive image that is framed by somebody else's gaze (in the beginning, the mother's or her substitute's), or through the frame of a screen or interface of some kind (mirror, computer interface, television monitor etc.). In this phase of the construction of the self, which takes place during approximately the first six to eighteen months of a child's life, the child recognizes him- or herself in the mirror as a being separate from his or her environment (especially from the mother). Through the recognition of his or her own Gestalt, the child anticipates his or her corporeal unity, which is needed in order to build a proper ego. This results in the lack of an "original" bodily identity tracing back to *one* origin of a body image, such as the genetic mixture of the parents' bodies, and hence in the loss of a secure historical representation of the body (such as the presentation of a growing body in a child's photo album). The stable concept of identity is replaced by what Lacan calls the "fractal body," whose identity depends on a process of "inscription" and semanticization through an outside world. The idea of a fractal body, not responsible or even aware of the bodily images that it is producing, provokes a profound discussion and repositioning of subjectivity in the twentieth century.

In *The Ego and the Id* ([1923] 1975), Freud talks about the body-ego as a border-surface, a "skin sack," or a "skin fold." In other words, the skin for Freud is a psychic hull that constitutes the contact between the outer world and the psyche: "The surface of the body, the skin, moreover, provides the ground for the articulation of orifices, erotogenic rims, cuts on the body's surface, loci of exchange between the inside and the outside, points of conversion of the outside into the body, and of the inside out of the body" (Grosz 1995, 188). For Freud, the skin is what constitutes the ego: "The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surface of the body, . . . representing the surfaces of the mental apparatus" (Freud [1923] 1975, 294).[8]

Many definitions of the skin, and more generally of the human interface or surface, have been proposed since the beginnings of psychoanalysis; whether or not these attempts have taken into account a psychoanalytic key of analysis, all of them agree on the importance of the skin. French dermatologist and philosopher François Dagognet, for instance, presents a physical anthropology in which any "interface" of the body is regarded as a region of choice (1982, 49). For Dagognet, the skin obtains an incomparable importance over any other body part: in the skin, the relation between outside and inside exists intensely.[9] In a later book, *La peau découverte*, Dagognet characterizes the interdependency of the skin's "outside-inside" (*dehors-dedans*) and "inside-outside" (*dedans-dehors*) relationship as most relevant to the explanation of certain dermatological disorders such as acne, eczema, hives, and other skin diseases (1993).

The "timeless timeliness" of the preoccupation with the skin is shown in Steven Connor's recent in-depth account of the skin's significance in its historical and cultural imaginary. In his *Book of Skin*, Connor reads the skin cross-culturally, diachronically, and synchronically. He points to the skin's importance from the Egyptian embalming practice to contemporary tattooing or piercing trends. Similar to Dagognet, Connor puts the emphasis on the skin as boundary zone and medium of passage: "The skin is the vulnerable, unreliable boundary between inner and outer conditions and the proof of their frightening, fascinating intimate contiguity" (2004, 65).

It is perhaps post-Lacanian psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu who has introduced the most useful notion for a psychoanalytical account of the skin, taking into account both *chrós* (Greek for body as a whole and skin) and *dérma* (Greek for fur, skin, leather). Anzieu's notion of the "skin-ego" draws a comparison between the complexity of the skin and its different functions—namely, anatomical, physiological, cultural—and the complexity of the psychic ego. Of all our perceptive organs, the skin is the most vital one: one could live blind, deaf, and lacking the senses of taste and smell, but without the integrity of the major part of the skin organ, one could not survive (Anzieu 1995, 13). The skin has also the greatest mass (20 percent of the total body weight of a newborn, and 18 percent of an adult's weight) and occupies the largest surface (2,500 cm^2 of the newborn, and 1,800 of the adult) of all our organs. The skin serves as an "interface" between "me" and the "other" on the one hand by protecting the ego like an envelope, and on the other hand by dividing it from the outer world. The first skin the baby recognizes as meaningful is that of its mothering environment. Thus it is not until the mirror and the Oedipal stages that the infant gets "into its own skin," building up its ego on the basis of the (mis)recognition of itself in the mirror in the wake of a functional fragmentation, as shown by Lacan in his "mirror stage." For Anzieu, the skin plays the most

important role in psychic development because the ego can only be built on the basis of its experience of the sur-face of the (mother's) body.

Phenomenology

Similar to psychoanalysis, phenomenology tries to separate the subject of the body (the world as perceived through one's body) from the objectified body (the body as it is perceived by the world)—a distinction between the subject of perception and the socially constructed body, between the psychoanalytical "Je" and the "Moi."

The notion of the immediate perception of the world through one's own skin was central to the thought of French phenomenologist Henri Bergson. For Bergson, the body image had two distinctive and somewhat paradoxically interrelated sides. On the one hand, *l'image du corps* is the way in which the subject perceives his or her own body, a perception corresponding to the Freudian psychoanalytical category ideal-ego, which later becomes the body-ego, or *ego tout court*. The body becomes a necessary intermediary between the self and the unknowable outside reality of the body, organizing the relations to the outside through the mediation of images; the image one has of oneself is therefore the center of one's being and perception, a kind of "interface" to the world (Bergson [1896] 1949). On the other hand, *l'image de corps* indicates that the body itself is the perceptive apparatus through which the world is processed. This means that the image is itself produced by the body (auto-perceptive), the intermediary source of all images (corpocentrism). In other words, the body is at the same time mirror or screen for the images from the "outside" and perceptive center; the body is "what takes shape at the center of perception" (Bergson, qtd. in Andrieu 1993, 60; my translation). Nevertheless, this taking shape is constantly blurred by the motion of the body, because the Bergsonian body is "a moving limit between future and past" (Andrieu 1993, 62).

Unlike with psychoanalysis, for Bergson there is no unconscious, only an *unconsciousness*. In the Bergsonian notion of the body, there is no rupture between events. Rather, all memory is related to the totality of events that precedes it and that comes after it. The unconscious mental state is, therefore, nothing other than a never-perceived material object, or a non-imagined image (Andrieu 1993, 64). The body (and not the soul) provides equilibrium to the mind, and is therefore the complementary pole to the mind, without which orientation toward action would never be possible. For Bergson, matter is within space and mind outside of it. There is no possible immediate transition between these dimensions. Rather, the mind enters in contact with matter through the function of *time*. The body in turn possesses the material capacity to translate the intensity of time into action. In this way, the mind itself is not directly materialized but rather becomes the body in action after first traversing the possible intensities of mem-

ory (Andrieu 1993, 65). Bergson thus develops a theory of indirect unity: it is not in perception, or in memory, or in the activities of the mind that the body contributes directly to representation; rather, the body is indirectly united with the spirit, and the markers of this unification are the image on the one hand, and the skin (or a rethinking of that border zone) on the other.

The upshot of Bergson's contribution is the impossibility of thinking consciousness outside embodiment, because mind is only ever manifest in the actions of a body over time. Likewise, for Bergson's contemporary Edmund Husserl (both were born in 1859), the discipline of phenomenology he founded sought the truth of consciousness in how the subject lives in his or her body. Whereas for Immanuel Kant—Husserl's intellectual father—phenomenology meant the study of empirical appearances, for Husserl phenomenology means the "science of essences" (*Wesenswissenschaft*).[10] For Husserl, at stake are not real appearances, existences, things, or essences, but the intentionally conscious gaze onto the essences (*Wesensschau*). In other words, consciousness is always consciousness *of* something. Reality has no absolute or independent status, but is always presupposed as intentionality, or intentional appearance. As a result, the body is no longer a symptom, a sign, or any other kind of manifestation or placeholder (for something else); rather, it becomes the presence in the world of an intentional subject and his or her psychological experience of the world. It is here that a body discourse can start to disperse the body, by literally opening it up to investigation.

A generation after Bergson and Husserl, French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty dedicated his entire work to the problem of the lived (perceiving) body and its image, from his early *Phénomenologie de la perception* (1945) to the unfinished *Le Visible et l'invisible* (1964).[11] In Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, the body (*Leib*) has become inseparable from the world it inhabits, because body and earth (i.e., the body's environment) are related through the world's presence in the body: "the body not only flows over into a world whose schema it bears in itself but possesses this world at a distance rather than being possessed by it" (qtd. in Weiss 1999, 10). The "pragmatic turn" of this phenomenological approach lies in the fact that this body is only a body by virtue of its use by a subject—in other words, through the way in which a subject's presence in the world embodies it (Andrieu 1993, 272). Merleau-Ponty argues that the outer world is necessarily perceived through a lived body. He thus founds a philosophy of embodiment and primordial presence that for Gail Weiss constitutes the departing point in her analysis of the body image, leading her to develop a theory of embodiment as *intercorporeality*: "To describe embodiment as intercorporeality is to emphasize that the experience of being embodied is never a private affair, but is always already mediated by our continual interactions with other human and nonhuman bodies" (qtd. in Weiss 1999, 5).

Lacan had specified that a child always comes to its self-identity via a fundamental misrecognition of its own body. This concept of a "body in pieces" (*corps morcelé*) is, in other words, already distinctly phenomenological, meaning that the infant's own "experience" of itself prior to the organization of the image in the mirror is a body-in-pieces.[12] It is thus precisely in respect to the lived body experience that Merleau-Ponty's thought converges with Lacan's notion of the mirror stage, in that for both thinkers the notion of an experienced embodiment goes along with a double alienation, the recognition of oneself in a deceptive image that is framed through somebody else's gaze, a mirror, a screen: "At the same time, this body image makes possible a kind of alienation, the capturing of myself through my spatial image. The image prepares me for another alienation, that of myself (as viewed) by others" (qtd. in Andrieu 1993, 295; my translation). Indeed, as far as this aspect is concerned, the projects of Lacan and Merleau-Ponty to explain subjectivity as it unfolds in the infant are very similar. As Weiss points out, they both emphasize "that it is this very schism that makes it possible for the child to project and extend her/his own bodily awareness beyond the immediacy of her/his introceptive experiences by incorporating the perspective of the other toward one's own body—a perspective one actively participates in—rather than having it thrust upon one from the outside" (1999, 13). In other words, the "inscription" and semanticization through an outside world onto the body—as I described embodiment earlier—is not a process that the subject undergoes, but on the contrary, one in which she or he is actively involved. "Inscription" does not occur without the subject's intercorporeal interaction providing both an "outside-inside," as well as an "inside-outside" perspective. What is more, with phenomenology the emphasis now lies on the production of images, and no longer on the libidinal investments that in Freud's theory shift from the mouth to the anus and finally to the sexual organs.

With Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception and the lived body "flowing over into a world," the ground is laid for discussing concrete embodiment, and for posing questions that concern the gendered body and the raced body in new ways, as can be seen in an apparently infinite number of body installations in contemporary media art. Nevertheless, concreteness is also realized in another dimension—namely, that of language and the body's embeddedness in it. In linguistic terms, we can say that from the Husserlian phenomenology of the systemic side of language, the *langue*, Merleau-Ponty moves the emphasis to the pragmatic, speech-act side of the *parole*. In the realm of the parole, Merleau-Ponty slowly distances himself from the Husserlian distinction between *Körper* and *Leib*, substituting it with a broadened Leib-notion, in which language becomes the body of thought.[13]

It is no doubt his emphasis on the inderdependency of body and world, and the resulting notion of embodiment as inseparable from the original kinship with the world, that turned Merleau-Ponty into arguably the greatest influence for body theorists of the twentieth century. Whether a constructivist, a performative, a volatile, or even an essentialist account of the body, all of these ways of thinking the body presume that the body is *world access* (given, construed, performed, or even all at once). Merleau-Ponty's philosophy has thus not diminished in its influence and importance, especially as it has been reinterpreted in recent times in, for instance, the work of contemporary French philosopher Renaud Barbaras.[14]

Barbaras reminds us of a crucial quote in the *Phénoménologie de la perception*, in which Merleau-Ponty declares that the body "'*has* its world or understands its world without having to pass through representations;' it '*is* the potentiality of the world'" (qtd. in Barbaras 2004, 7).[15] In that sense, the body *constitutes* mediation and vice versa. Since Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, this universe is no longer conceived in a Cartesian manner that takes the thinking subject as a secure point of departure against the objects in the world; the body—"the fabric into which all objects are woven" (Merleau-Ponty [1945] 1962, 235)[16]—is thus not a mere "intermediary," an "in-between" the subject and the world, but rather a unifier of a holistic subjectivity and a fragmented objectivity that effectively undermines the existence of these very categories.

From Fragmentation to Mediation

I now turn to the realms of digitally enhanced body art and new media art and architecture in order to, first, discuss turn-of-the-millennium body installations that reflect the previously outlined body concepts and, second, trace that concept back to the struggling dialogue between fragmentation and holism.

To this end, it is important briefly to situate body-oriented art in the late twentieth century. As Amelia Jones points out in her groundbreaking book *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (1998), the body had underdone two moments of particular reevaluation in twentieth-century art. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the body was featured as "raw material," a site of the inscription of cultural meaning. In these body installations, the body is just coming out from the realm of painting, having replaced the materiality of the paintbrush and color with the materiality of the actual body, often featured in ritualistic practices, such as Austrian actionist Hermann Nitsch's "Orgy-mystery-theater." It is no coincidence that in these "body collages" of the 1960s, the body was also used literally as paintbrush (Yves Klein's famous *Anthropometrie of the Blue Period* [1960]). In addition, the body was often harmed physically (e.g., Chris Burden) or symbolically (e.g., Yoko Ono) in what I have called "1960s wounds."[17] The body as raw material

features, according to Jones, the transition from a modernist body subjectivity that was struggling with the Cartesian mind-body split, to a dispersed postmodern subjectivity of a bodily self that is construed into a variety of forms and shapes with the help and through the eyes of the audience/witnesses. A feminist approach to this kind of body art (e.g., Valie Export, Cindy Sherman, and others), with its critique of the male gaze directly affecting the female body, if not harming it, can only be seen as the necessary outcome of such performances. Relating these performances to the intellectual environment around the body, one can certainly detect a psychoanalytical interest in the body performances of the 1960s with such themes as the narcissistic body and the body in its relationship to others. During the 1980s, however, Jones detects a "turn away from the body" (1998, 198), which she interprets as a reaction to the politics in the Western hemisphere of this time: "This turn away from the body was also in some ways unfortunately coincident with the disembodied politics of the Reagan-Thatcher era, characterized by political retrenchment and reactionary, exclusionary economic and social policies and by the scrupulous avoidance of addressing the effects of such policies on the increasingly large number of bodies/selves living below the poverty line" (198).

Since the 1990s, we have been witnessing a dramatic return to the body and body art practices. These works, Jones states, "acknowledge the deep implications of the politics of representation in relation to the embodied subject" (1998, 198). In these "1990s extensions"[18] of the body, the self is no longer explored mainly in relation to culture and context (constructivism). Now, through the new possibilities of the technologies of the body, particularly those enhanced by new media, the body is under "technophenomenological" examination, to quote Jones once more: "The body/self is technophenomenological: fully mediated through the vicissitudes of bio- and communications technologies, and fully engaged with the social (what Merleau-Ponty called 'enworlded'). The body/self is hymenal, reversible, simultaneously both subject and object" (235).

It is here that we can detect, I believe, the crucial movement from fragmentation to mediation, since not only did this kind of reexamination of the "posthuman" body have to particularize and dissolve the body into its outer parts, but now—with the help of visual technologies such as MRI scans—the body's inner materiality has been taken into account as well. From a phenomenological standpoint, this body in pieces is now trying to see and experience itself as objectified. However, this objectification is no longer the result of a social constructivist critique but stems from the mere observation that "seeing" is always "creating a distance," to quote one of Merleau-Ponty's famous sentences. Thus, the body performances of the 1990s question the very attempt to learn anything about the body via the particularized knowledge we may have accumulated about its bits

and pieces. These 1990s bodies often do not feature any original bodily identity at all; they do not reveal a graspable subjectivity. Rather, they are returning to more primordial questions regarding the materialities of the body, such as questions of the body's appearance through its skin, the ego-envelope, or the border zone between inside and outside. Technology is the body's crucial counterpart in these performances that break down the distinction between a body's interiority and exteriority, between a distance to the body and a being in the body (e.g., Gary Hill, Bill Viola, and others). Technology serves as partner in featuring these often eerie and alienating body performances (e.g. the by now classic body extensions of Australian artist Stelarc).

But to go back to the Lacanian notion that the body image is always and by nature deceptive (framed by the other's gaze), these performances also express a deep skepticism and an almost nihilistic irony in their use of media and technology to promote such a confused and unstable body. As Derrida is reported to have said about Gary Hill's work, it reveals "that there is not and never has been a direct, live presentation." It is in this sense that the "1960s wounds" differ drastically from the "1990s extensions": the current body installations are no longer concerned with the reality of the gaze, of politics, of the injustice done to the body. The body is no mediator. Rather, these performances use the body to experiment and question the media throughout this shift from a *body* emphasis to a *medium* emphasis. No longer are these media "extensions of man" (have they ever been?); rather, what recent new media art and architecture practices show is that the body has been left behind insofar as the digital image has corporealized itself, has punched through the frame of materiality, and has therefore taken the place of the actual body. In this understanding, no body exists as "raw material," which implies that there is something like an original body, a body that is prior to inscription and semanticization. No, the current body under the influence of media technologies reveals itself as pure "materiality." It can therefore merge, bend, and by inhabiting it, we—the viewer participants—can become part not only of its phenotype, but also of its genotype, as the examples of *Blur* and *Synaptic Bliss* (to name just a few) go to show. What is at stake in these examples is a holistic body notion that has been fed or informed by a fragmented body—this is, a body whose pieces in fact have never been more penetrated and whose data have never been better collected than they are now in their being rendered into digital bits. But the output of this process does not assume a unified subject that only achieves its "wholeness" through the interrelation of the various body parts. The holism in question in these media art and architecture installations is of a different kind. It is a holism that authorizes every bit and every piece of the fragmented body to take over the body as a whole, to serve as interface.

As I have shown elsewhere,[19] in late-twentieth-century popular culture the body and all of its organs no longer simply serve as a medium of expression, as a semiotic layer toward the outer world. Rather, the body and its parts have themselves adopted the characteristics of a medium, wherein lies the "return to the holistic body concept." The discourse of "getting under the skin" was necessary to "free" the body strata of a given hierarchy. The skin and the other organs, thus freed, have taken on the role of pure mediation, of flat and "slippery" screens, of the sur-face on which the body as such is produced. On the basis of this, I suggest that we ask, Is this in fact any more a "body"—that is, a "human body"—that is being released as whole through these body installations? The answer is no, since these installations are examples of how the body of twentieth-century concerns in all the discussed realms, from psychoanalysis to phenomenology and cognitive science, has been replaced by issues regarding mediality itself. To rephrase Derrida's comment on Gary Hill's installation, we could say that through mediality the body has shown its true essence—that is, there never was a body to begin with.

Italian artist Alba D'Urbano is one of many who worked on the theme of the skin within the realm of new media. During the 1990s, she experimented with images of her own skin, which she digitized, processed, reshaped, and cut into the pattern of a "skin-suit."[20] In her project *Hautnah*[21] (German for "close to the skin") (1995), the artist "took off her own skin" to offer others the possibility of "walking through the world hidden 'under her skin'" (D'Urbano 1996, 272). *Hautnah* makes concrete the examination of the body as naked other, as confrontation between inner consciousness and outer reality, through the idea of abandoning one's own skin and entering somebody else's.

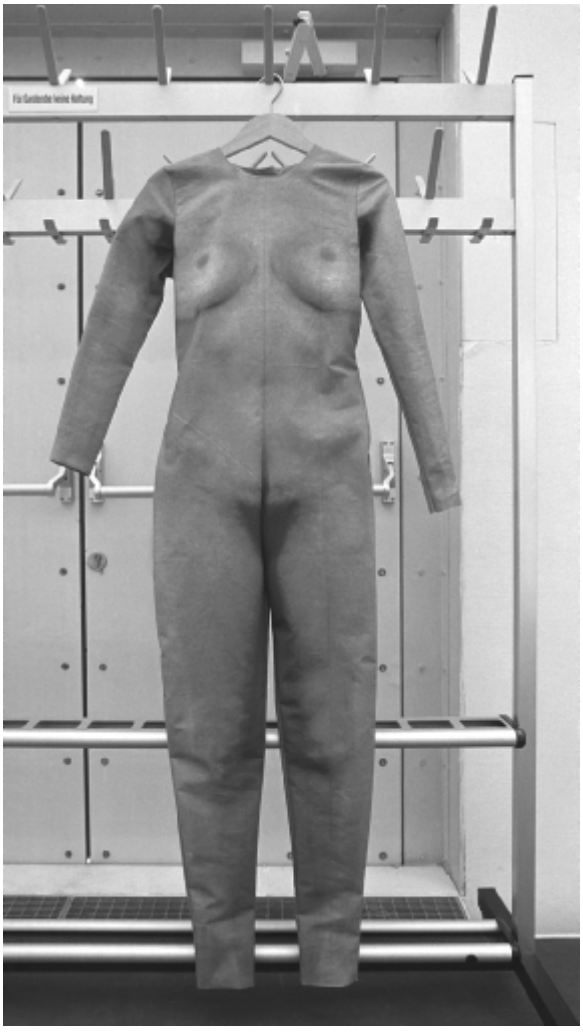
In this critique of the skin as sur-face, and as bodily exterior/interior, the artist ironically hangs her "skin-suit" on a coat-hanger (D'Urbano 1996, 274). Significantly, the "skin-suit"—made of material printed with images of the naked skin of the artist's body—has neither hands, nor feet, nor a face. These "interactive body parts," as the artist calls them, have been cut off. We are looking at a faceless, handless, and footless entity, which is nevertheless clearly a body. In other words, the body no longer needs the parts that stand in connectors for the entire body, to feature as whole. We may thus read the absent interactivity represented here not only as a feminist critique of a male-dominated gaze that has literally torn a female body into pieces, but also precisely as the previously described wish to dissociate from the body, as well as from the search for a subjectivity or originality of the body *tout court.* The sentence "Für Garderobe keine Haftung" (no liabilities for wardrobe) can, hence, be read as "This skin-suit really belongs to nobody. We are not responsible for it. You may hang it here, but you may not find it again upon your return." *Hautnah* makes clear what Amelia Jones states for 1990s

body practice in general: "a return to a notion of embodied subject as necessarily particularized . . . (in its) relation to other subjects in the social area" (1998, 202).

In her study of body images, Weiss reminds us that "inscription" does not occur without the subject's intercorporeal relationship with other human or nonhuman bodies. In *Hautnah*, D'Urbano challenges this notion, presenting a body in pieces that is beyond inscription as such. It hangs all alone in a wardrobe that no one even wants to take responsibility for. It has been left alone, with no claim of a subject's "belonging" other than the artist's, whose non-signature stands underneath it. The only "inscription" the skin-suit *Hautnah* features are the sexual body parts of a woman, her breasts and her vaginal hair. We may now read this as we wish: are these the material parts that cannot be gotten rid of? Maybe. What matters for my own concerns is, however, that the genitals are part of the skin-suit. They belong to the realm of appearance (figure 4.1).

If the questions of fragmentation and opposition (i.e., inside versus outside) were necessary to initiate the previously described dialogue within the new discipline of body criticism, the *Blur* "building" (2002), by architects Diller + Scofidio, can be seen as a step beyond or even an answer to such fragmentation. *Blur* is a "media building that hovers mysteriously over the lake" ("Diller + Scofidio *Blur* Building," 2000, 50). Technically speaking, the building—developed by the Extasia team for the Swiss Expo 2002 in Yverdons-Les-Bains on Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland—consists, like the human body, nearly entirely of water. *Blur* is a cloud of mist formed by 12,500 spray nozzles covering infrastructure and producing a fog system: "Lake water is filtered, then shot through a dense array of high-pressure fog nozzles and regulated by a computer control system" (50). Not only is *Blur* "smart weather," in that the building changes its appearance depending on the (unpredictable) weather of the day, but it is also, as Mark Hansen points out, "space that has been made wearable" (2002, 330)—not least with the help of the designated "braincoat" with which one experiences the building: "As visitors pass one another, their coats will compare profiles and change color indicating the degree of attraction or repulsion, much like an involuntary blush—red for affinity, green for antipathy. The system allows interaction among 400 visitors at any time"[22] (figure 4.2).

The architectural innovation of *Blur* lies not only and evidently in the fact that this is no longer a "building"—it is rather a "pure atmosphere," as Diller + Scofidio themselves emphasize—but also in the fact that this "habitable medium" (qtd. in Hansen 2002, 330) no longer emphasizes vision. Instead, it emphasizes the proprioceptive *bodily* experience of inhabiting space. In other words, Diller + Scofidio reevaluate and relativize the dominance of vision in architecture by providing an "immersive environment in which the world is put out of focus so that our visual dependency can be put into focus" (qtd. in Hansen 2002, 329) (figure 4.3).



| **Figure 4.1** |
Alba D'Urbano's *Hautnah* (1995). Courtesy of the artist.

| **Figure 4.2** |
Blur Raincoat Glow (2002). Courtesy of Diller + Scofidio.

Diller + Scofidio chose the instability of the weather because the weather is—as they say—one of the examples of our cultural obsession with control, and of the anxiety resulting from not being able to overpower our environments. The quintessence of the *Blur* bubble is to present weather not only as a natural process, but also as a cultural phenomenon: "At stake is how we interact with each other through weather, not only as a shared obsession but also as a process of global communication" ("Diller + Scofidio *Blur* Building," 2000, 55).

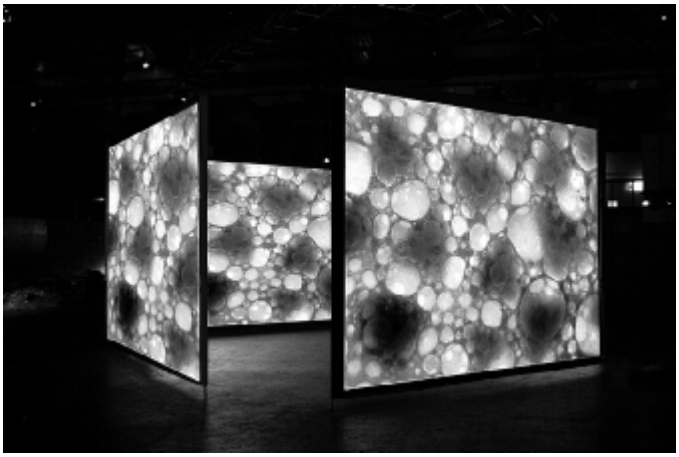
This example of architecture as "wearable space" goes to show how the logic of new media has infiltrated the contemporary body concept, and how the body, in turn, has become coeval with mediation. Architecture, traditionally conceived of as the craft of building a dwelling for man's body, now reflects a new understanding of the body—no longer as a separate, exterior structure to house a bodily interiority, but as a continued or extended embodiment of that body's essence as it has been grasped by the discourses we have analyzed here: as primordial mediation. In *Blur*, interactivity has constructed itself a house; the medium has become the body. Its final layer peeled off, the body is no

| **Figure 4.3** |
Blur View on Ramp (2002). Photograph by Beat Widmer. Courtesy of Diller + Scofidio.

longer a medium for something else, standing in for a truth or a reality that lies beyond the surface; rather, the surface has collapsed, merging inside and outside, refusing to relegate itself to the subservience of yet one last mediation, becoming, in other words, the body itself. Unlike *Hautnah*, *Blur* is engaged in a bodily notion of emergence, in which any questions of concrete particularized embodiment are no longer discussable, but only to be *experienced*. It is in this sense one of the best examples of a return to a lived body notion, one that gives back the power to the individual and his or her unique experience. Every "inhabitant" of *Blur* will experience the house in her or his own way.

Media artists Aziz + Cucher's latest series of media installations, *Synaptic Bliss*, is another attempt at merging the subject with media. Their attempt at this fusion, however, is of a symbolic nature. There is no immersive interactivity at play, as in *Blur*: rather *Synaptic Bliss* is a "metaphorical attempt to represent cycles of growth and decay, different rhythms that find audiovisual expression."[23] What interests me from a media-theoretical position in Aziz + Cucher's latest work is not the fact that instead of the body's interior (see their previous installation series, *Interiors* [1999–2002]) the artists now explore the border and limit of "natural environments," but rather to what extent their work deconstructs the difference between external and internal images (figure 4.4).

Whereas *Hautnah* clearly engages in a struggling discourse that is shown to suffer a nostalgic drag in getting rid of the bodily interiors (interestingly, it does not raise the claim of ever being able to leave behind the inscriptions of gender), the new media architecture pieces *Blur* and *Synaptic Bliss* have gotten rid of the body by literally merging the flesh of technology with that of the interacting viewer-participant. The medium



| **Figure 4.4** |
Aziz + Cucher's *Synaptic Bliss* installation at Parc de la Villette Paris (2004). Courtesy of the artists.

that signifies the body, its "representation," is no longer any different from the "raw material" of the body of the installation itself. Without mediation, the body is nothing; moreover, mediation is already what the body always was, in its various historical and cultural strata. *Synaptic Bliss* adds to this that even without immersive, interactive new media strategies, the images are here intended to invoke *feelings of immersion*: "This series of work is very sensorial, almost psychedelic; it attempts to bring the viewer into an ecstatic awareness of their bodies in their surrounding environment as a process of infinite interconnection (hence 'Synaptic') which in our understanding also brings a feeling of joy ('Bliss') as opposed to one of confusion in the inability to separate one's self from the outside."[24] This psychedelic ecstasy of the inseparability of inside and outside addresses issues of the *image de corps*, that is, issues concerning the body as perceptive apparatus, which were already central to Bergson's corpocentrism. As Hans Belting points out in his anthropology of images, "Internal and external representations, or mental and physical images, may be considered two sides of the same coin" (Belting 2005, 304). This is why, for Belting, images cannot be described by an "exclusively medialogical approach" (305). Rather, he reminds us that images may live in us, but they need our bodies to show up. He further explains that bodies serve as living media that make us perceive, project, or remember images. It is in light of this observation that I can suggest a final conclusion about these new media art and architecture installations: namely, it is not exclusively the question of interactivity that reveals the body as

mediality, as in *Blur*. Rather, as so brilliantly shown in Aziz + Cucher's latest project, imagination, vision, and images are already there to entertain the body's mediatic nature.

The "post-psychoanalysts" Deleuze and Guattari have reconfigured the process of fragmentation as a relation of "organ-ized" strata to a state of radical and virtual disorganization they call the plane of immanence (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 154). The body in this view is no longer mediation, but rather the potentiality underlying all mediation. Starting already in *Hautnah*, and much more visibly in *Blur* and *Synaptic Bliss*, this dialogue between the body as a whole and as a multiplicity of fragments has been expressed in both visual (*Synaptic Bliss*) and haptic terms (*Blur*); what the history of this time demonstrates—and what I am ultimately arguing—is that the apparently contrary vectors of fragmentation and holism are in fact part and parcel of the same historical development. In other words, the discovery of the body as mediation has converged with an age of mediatic proliferation, such that what we are in fact witnessing in the apparent continuing fragmentation of the body is the work of mediation itself *as* the body. It is for this reason that there can be no history of the body that is not at the same time a study of the various media that constitute embodiment as such.

The advent of new media has facilitated the move of the reunion between holism and fragmentation enormously. One must acknowledge that it is because of posthuman technology and because of the realm of new media that the body has survived not as a whole, but rather in a dispersed and scattered way—or better: due to this technology, the body was able to adapt a new form of wholeness that manifests itself as a multiplicity and plurality of forms. The result of this discussion is a new body concept that could only have emerged from the grounds of early twentieth-century phenomenology and psychoanalysis, but would also be inconceivable outside the achievements of artificial intelligence and cognitive science on the one hand, and the feminist criticism of the resulting notion of disembodiment on the other hand, as well as outside new media revolutions of the later twentieth century.

Notes

1. The Nouvelle Histoire emerged to a large extent as a reaction against positivistic approaches to history in the late nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century, French historians enlarged and enriched the historical discipline with writings of various kinds, from archeological to oral documents. Opposed to the notion of "historical event," the methods of the new historians focused on delivering a "problematic and not automatic" concept of history (Le Goff 1978, 218). The present was to be understood through the past, and the past through the present. An important concept, coined by historian Fernand Braudel (1958), was "la longue durée." This temporal concept entailed that, despite history's fast changes, historical deep structures

can only be grasped over time, because changes in economic and social systems can only be evaluated long after a system has been implemented.

2. In 1929 Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre founded the journal *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* to accompany and illustrate the achievements of the new historians.
3. I cannot include here the development of this new body concept from the realms of cognitive science and consciousness studies. This treatment can, however, be found in the extended version of "Making Room for the Body," chapter 1 in Wegenstein 2006.
4. "The Medium Is the Body," chapter 4 in Wegenstein 2006, features many more examples of such digitally enhanced organic environments, which Mark Hansen (2004) has described as examples of "second-order interactivity," in his analysis of the Dutch architects NOX's latest Son-O-House installation. In a lecture at the University at Buffalo in the fall of 2004, Hansen pointed out that this is no longer a first-order interactive project that works within a stimulus-response module, but action is here guided by perception in action, and therefore extends both the human and the machinic autopoetic capacity. In this "house-that-is-not-a-house" (Marcus Leinweber from NOX in an interview with the author), the viewer-participant influences not only the phenotype of the installation, but its genotype, and does so by influencing the real-time composition itself that generates the sounds in the installation.
5. Parts of the sections on psychoanalysis and phenomenology are taken from "Making Room for the Body," chapter 1 in Wegenstein 2006.
6. Although the importance of recognition by the other was, of course, already a key notion in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in 1807.
7. Delivered as a lecture in 1936; see also Lacan 1966.
8. English footnote, added in 1927 to the English translation.
9. This definition clearly resonates with the analogy of the gendered body's inside and outside relationship as Möbius strip described by Elizabeth Grosz in *Volatile Bodies*: "The Möbius strip model has the advantage of showing that there can be a relation between two 'things'—mind and body—which presumes neither their identity nor their radical disjunction, a model which shows that while there are disparate 'things' being related, they have the capacity to twist one into the other. This enables the mind/body relation to avoid the impasses of reductionism, of a narrow causal relation or the retention of the binary divide. It enables subjectivity to be understood not as the combination of a psychical depth and a corporeal superficiality but as a surface whose inscriptions and rotations in three-dimensional space produce all the effects of depth" (1994, 209–210).
10. It is worth mentioning that for Hegel, again, phenomenology had yet another meaning: namely, the description of human consciousness as a process leading from sensual

naïveté through ethics, art, religion, science, philosophy, and ultimately to the state of absolute knowledge.

11. As Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch point out in their introduction to *The Embodied Mind*, during the times of Merleau-Ponty in the 1940s and 1950s, "the potential sciences of mind were fragmented into disparate, noncommunicating disciplines; neurology, psychoanalysis, and behaviorist experimental psychology" (1991, vvi). They note that is was not until the emergence of cognitive science in the 1970s that cognitive psychology, linguistics, artificial intelligence, and philosophy could be included in the study of mind.
12. I am grateful to Stuart Murray (University of Toronto) for bringing this to my attention.
13. In the space of this essay, I cannot discuss the convergences between Merleau-Ponty and the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger. It is precisely within the realm and the notion of *language*, the Merleau-Pontian "soil of genesis" (translators' introduction to Barbaras 2004, 137), that the two philosophers encounter each other. To give just one very famous quotation from Heidegger: "Language is the house of being. In its home human beings dwell. Those who think and those who create with words are the guardians of this home" ([1949] 1998, 239).
14. Renaud Barbaras, *Le désir et la distance*, 1999; *Le tournant de l'expérience*, 1998; *Merleau-Ponty*, 1997; *La perception*, 1994; *De l'être du phénomène: L'ontologie de Merleau-Ponty* [The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology], 1991.
15. This formulation is evident in body art and body installations in the twentieth century, which are discussed in chapter 2 in Wegenstein 2006.
16. I want to give the full citation of this famous quotation: "[My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven,] and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension.'"
17. See chapter 2, "Body Performances from 1960s Wounds to 1990s Extensions," in Wegenstein 2006.
18. See chapter 2 in Wegenstein 2006.
19. See chapter 3, "How Faces Have Become Obsolete," in Wegenstein 2006, as well as the earlier version (Wegenstein 2002).
20. I would like to add just one other example of the attempt to conserve a woman's skin from Marina de Van's recent film *Dans ma peau* (2002). The main protagonist, Esther, suffers from body dysmorphic disorder in that she engages in self-mutilating practices. Her alienation and disassociation from her own body is presented as a necessary condition for these self-mutilations. As de Van explains in the director's commentary: "By focusing only on one's own body and one's relation to one's body, all other social relations cannot but fail." De Van wants to show the transformation of Esther's own body fragment such as a leg or an arm into an object; an object that in fact gives her pleasure in her several "self-mutilation orgies."

21. This example stems from an extensive discussion of body art and other examples from popular culture in Wegenstein 2002.
22. http://www.arcspace.com/architects/DillerScofidio/blur_building/.
23. Aziz + Cucher in an interview with the author, February 16, 2005.
24. Aziz + Cucher in an interview with the author, February 16, 2005.

Works Cited

Andrieu, Bernard. 1993. *Le corps dispersé: Histoire du corps au XXe siècle.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

Anzieu, Didier. 1995. *Le moi-peau.* Paris: DUNOD.

Artaud, Antonin. [1947] 1976. "To Have Done with the Judgment of God, A Radio Play." In *Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Barbaras, Renaud. 2004. *The Being of the Phenenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology.* Trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Belting, Hans. 2005. "Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology." In *Critical Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (Winter): 302–319.

Bergson, Henri. [1896] 1949. *Matière et mémoire.* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Braudel, Fernand. 1958. "Histoire et sciences sociales. La longue durée." In *Annales* 13: 725–753.

Connor, Steven. 2004. *The Book of Skin.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Dagognet, François. 1982. *Faces, Surfaces, Interfaces.* Paris: Librairies Philosophique J. Vrin.

Dagognet, François. 1993. *La peau découverte.* Le Plessis-Robinson: Collection Les Empêcheurs de Penser en Ronde.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia.* Ed. and trans. Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Diller + Scofidio. 2002. *Blur: The Making of Nothing.* New York: Abrams.

"Diller + Scofidio *Blur* Building." 2000. *TransReal*, no. 7: 50.

Duden, Barbara. 1991. *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor's Patients in Eighteenth-century Germany.* Trans. Thomas Dunlap. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

D'Urbano, Alba. 1996. "The Project *Hautnah*, or Close to the Skin." In *Photography after Photography: Memory and Representation in the Digital Age*, ed. Hubertus V. Amelunxen, Stefan Iglhaut, and Florian Rötzer, 270–275. Amsterdam and Munich: G+B Arts International.

Freud, Sigmund. [1923] 1975. "Das Ich und das Es" [The Ego and the Id]. In *Studienausgabe: Psychologische Schriften*, vol. 3. Frankfurt: S. Fischer.

Giddens, Anthony. 1990. *The Consequences of Modernity.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1994. *Volatile Bodies.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Grosz, Elizabeth. 1995. "Psychoanalysis and the Imaginary Body." In *Feminist Subjects, Multi-media: Cultural Methodologies*, ed. Penny Florence and Dee Reynolds, 172–191. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Hansen, Mark. 2002. "Wearable Space." *Configurations* 10, no. 2: 321–370. Special issue. In *Makeover: Writing the Body into the Posthuman Technoscape. Part I: Embracing the Posthuman*, ed. Timothy Lenoir. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hansen, Mark. 2004. *New Philosophy for New Media.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Heidegger, Martin. [1949] 1998. "Letter on "Humanism." Trans. Frank. A. Capuzzi. In *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Jones, Amelia. 1998. *Body Art: Performing the Subject.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Lacan, Jacques. 1966. "The Mirror Stage as Formation of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," delivered as a lecture in 1936. In *Écrits: A Selection*, 1–7. New York: Norton.

Le Goff, Jacques. 1978. "L'Histoire nouvelle." In *La Nouvelle Histoire*, ed. Jacques Le Goff, Roger Chartier, and Jacques Revel. Paris: CEPL.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. [1945] 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception.* Trans. Colin Smith. London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1973. *The Prose of the World.* Trans. John O'Neill. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Revel, Jacques. 1995. "Introduction." In *Histories: French Constructions of the Past*, ed. Jacques Revel and Lynn Hunt, 1–65. New York: The New Press.

Turner, Bryan S. [1984] 1996. *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory.* Revised ed. London: Sage.

Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. 1991. *The Embodied Mind.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Wegenstein, Bernadette. 2002. "Getting Under the Skin, or, How Faces Have Become Obsolete." *Configurations* 10, no. 2: 221–259. Special issue. In *Makeover: Writing the Body into the Posthuman Technoscape. Part I: Embracing the Posthuman*, ed. Timothy Lenoir. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wegenstein, Bernadette. 2003. "If you won't SHOOT me, at least DELETE me! Performance Art from 60's Wounds to 90's Extensions." In *Data Made Flesh: Embodying Information*, ed. Robert Mitchell and Phillip Thurtle, 221–229. London and New York: Routledge.

Wegenstein, Bernadette. 2006. *Getting Under the Skin: Body and Media Theory.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Weiss, Gail. 1999. *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality.* London and New York: Routledge.