

## Conference Report

### Practices and their bodies. What kind of artefact is the lived body? 2<sup>nd</sup> Mainz Symposium of Social and Cultural Studies

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From 25 to 27 April 2013, the Research Center of Social and Cultural Studies Mainz (SOCUM) hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mainz Symposium of Social and Cultural Studies. The international conference "Practices and their bodies. What kind of artefact is the lived body?" followed the concept approved in 2011 by the first symposium "Materialites. Challenges for the social and cultural studies".

For a quite long time, the human body as the subject of research was scrutinized primarily through the natural sciences. This has changed in the last two decades, as cultural studies and social sciences have established a variety of approaches to the human body. Besides anthropological and phenomenological contributions that view the body as the fundamental site of sensory perception, personality, and subjectivity, ethnological and historical studies have shown that our scientific knowledge of the body is part of historically and culturally specific semantics. This year's conference appealed to discuss the body as part of material culture. The leading question was: what kind of artefact is the lived body?

In general, the conference organization worked very well. Despite the dense programme, enough time was arranged for coffee and lunch breaks. The conference was structured into two sessions running parallel, supplemented by four keynote talks and the "Georg Forster Lecture" closing the second conference day. The conference language was predominantly English; presentations in German were simultaneously translated.

After a welcome address and introduction by Stefan Hirschauer (Mainz), the conference started with a keynote talk by Chris Shilling (Kent), one of the originators of body theory. Shilling pointed out how the idea of closed bodies or *homo clausus* changed to an idea of connected, open bodies. His research project on religion and bodily practices is concerned with religious habitus as embodied intersection of worldly and other-worldly realities by enframing the former in the latter and transforming embodied human experience.

The first session dealt with "Distributed Bodies & Collectives". It started with a presentation by Haruka Okui (Kyoto), who examined the *Awaji Ningyo Joruri*, one of the oldest types of puppet theatre in Japan. By using video data, he firstly reflected on the nonverbal bodily interactions among the three puppeteers who cooperate to animate one puppet, secondly clarified the gap between tacit signals and explicit messages, and thirdly examined the multiple structures of their bodily action depending on highly abstract affective elements, such as mood or atmosphere. Cornelia Schadler's (Wien) talk was concerned with the transformation of bodies during the transition to parenthood. Bodies are simultaneously solid and transforming, as they change their morphologies, gain new knowledge and form new contemporary unions, but have solid morphologies or skills at the same time. Both the solid and transformative state have to be constantly formed and reproduced within practices. Third to speak in the session was Ehler Voss (Siegen), who focussed on family therapy in the tradition of Bert Hellinger. During the therapeutic process, people from the audience serve as representatives of the family, reporting on bodily symptoms and feelings of the people they stand for. Regular participation leads to establishing a certain habitus and certain beliefs expected by the therapist. The body serves as a medium for communication, divination and necromancy. Stefanie Husel (Düsseldorf) talked about bodily practices in theatre performances. There is neither pure sending practice from the stage nor pure receiving practice from the audience. Based on multi-media data from a performance of the piece

“Bloody Mess”, she asked if ‘audiencing’ is a collective practice of making sense, which is in itself highly performative, and if audiences are to be described as collective bodies.

Session 2 was on “Cooking, (Over)Eating, Tasting”. Elsa Mescoli (Milano) discussed the construction of the self of Moroccan female migrants in Italy by exerting certain body techniques like gestures and movements while preparing food. Food as an object of intercultural policies and practices gives migrants the opportunity to express themselves while performing cultural differences by means of corporeal language. The second talk by Anna Mann (Amsterdam) centred on taste as a fundamental cultural expression rather than a physiological mechanism. She reported on two experiments in sensory science laboratories measuring flavour perception and sensory specific satiety, and showed that the body is non-coherent and executed through practice. Else Vogel (Amsterdam) discussed the ‘naturalness’ of the body against the background of obesity and obesity prevention. She illustrated two different approaches: one is linking the rising incidence of obesity in Western societies with processed food and drinks. It establishes the body as an object determined by causal chains, as ‘evolutionary-shaped’ and ‘naturally’ going for calorie-rich food. The other shows how professionals like dieticians encourage their clients to self-regulate the body’s natural capacities in a sensitive way. The last contributor in this session was Cora Bender (Heidelberg), who was concerned with the alarmingly high incidence of obesity, diabetes and heart diseases in Native American communities as a direct effect of so called ‘commodities’, i.e. industrialized food originally given by the state replacing traditional diets. Today, commodity food must be seen in its deeper ambivalent social meaning, as a medium of dependence (on the American state), as a medium of independence (from the local job markets) and as a medium of interdependence (sharing resources).

The first conference day closed with a keynote talk by Martin Dinges (Stuttgart), who pointed out that present discussions on men’s health are strongly influenced by historical development. This is most evident in the considerable differences between male and female life expectancy during the last 150 years, referring to gender-specific distribution of work, health-risks, marking of health and utilization of medical provision.

Session 3 on “Practicing & Embodying” started with a presentation from Sophie-Merit Mueller (Tübingen) on the multiple involvements of bodies in ballet training. As ballet is based on codified, complex movements, it needs bodies with a particular, constant preparedness allowing them to serve as the ‘instrument’ of the dancer and ‘material’ of the choreographer. In order to be able to work, the body must be worked on in practical training. Robert Mitchell (Oldenburg) presented the construction, maintainability and modification of bodies in the two different ‘movement orders’ of ballet and *taijiquan*. Both require different bodily artefacts, depending on the ‘grammar’ of systemized movements. Cassis Kilian (Mainz) considered actors as anthropologists of the body. Different from other physical techniques, the passivity of the body is needed for acting: actors do not train their bodies for a certain skill, but attempt to get rid of habitual imprints to make their bodies obtainable for various ways of inhabiting. Following Victor Turner, acting is described as a liminal state of the body. The session ended with Klaus-Christian Zehbe’s (Cottbus) presentation of his research on the meaning of wearing a mask for shaping a theatrical character. He asked how a theatrical mask contributes to the physicality and behaviour of the performer and to the psycho-physical constitution of the performer’s body in theatrical performance.

First to speak in Session 4 on “Deviant Bodies, Social Differences” was Madalina Florescu (Porto). Her research is on the colonial history of Portuguese-Kimbundu speakers and the meaning of the *mundele* as a living artefact of this history. Being a *mundele* is connected with a sort of ‘whiteness’, but this does not depend on the colour of the skin, but on behaviour, intentions and social practice. Barbara Holler (Falmer/Sussex) gave an overview on her ethnographic fieldwork in a housing estate in the Southeast of England, highlighting the bodily experiences and perceptions of unemployed women, especially single-mothers on benefits. Various acts of consumption, certain clothes, gold jewellery and hair-styles as well

as the spatial organisation of bodies (they either hardly ever leave the estate or are using buses that are not used by the middle class) were introduced to reflect on social racism and re-evaluate analytical concepts such as class and identity. Subsequently, Anika Skotak (Mannheim) introduced the video art "Wild Zone 1" of Dutch artist L. A. Raeven, showing identical twins, who expose their own bodies and explore the boundaries of body functions. By their apparent denial of present body ideals, they position themselves as corporeal negation of consumerist society, as perverse artefacts or anti-bodies. L. A. Raeven's bodies not only infringe boundaries, but make the act of reception an inconvenient experience for the audience. Ellen Koban (Mainz) focussed on the catwalk as a theatrically framed communicative situation, staging both bodies and clothes. Today, it serves as an increasingly experimental stage of ambivalent gender. Using the example of 'supermodel' Andrej Pejic, who presents both men's and women's clothing or shoes, Koban discussed the importance or rather the loss of gender differentiating practices in ambiguous contexts like fashion or arts, reformulating the concept of 'un/doing gender' by Stefan Hirschauer.

The morning sessions finished with a keynote talk by Gesa Lindemann (Oldenburg) on the embodiment of the social through violence. Violence explicates the normative structures of a society, and as lethal violence is the very boundary of the social, violence has to be channelled and restricted. Three orders of channelling and restricting violence were described: first the order of "dividualizing sociation", second the order of "individualizing sociation", and third the order of "individualizing pluri-sociation".

Session 5 focused on "Representations & Reconstructions: Deciphering Historic Bodies". Melanie Augstein (Leipzig) asked how archaeologists can reconstruct body practices against the background of greatly reduced, fragmented bodies (or merely 'traces of bodies', as remarked from the audience). By incorporating body images from the Stones Age to the Roman Iron Age as well as involving osteoarchaeological methods, ways and means of reconstructing the 'ill or injured body', the 'working body', the 'body as semaphore' or as a sign itself were considered. Jaya Remond (Harvard) was concerned with Vogtherr's "Kunstbüchlein", first published in 1538, a pattern-book showing a selection of body parts together with an extraordinary diversity of gestures in their anatomic details. Rather than the observation of nature, the works of other artists like Dürer or Raimondi provided models for Vogtherr. With this, he aimed to inspire artists and craftsmen to form their own visual resources and increase creativity. Next, Ole Fischer (Weimar) outlined the gender specific ideals of eating habits, using the example of meat consumption. Besides alcohol consumption, meat consumption is particularly strongly associated with gender stereotypes, such as men eating a lot and preferably bloody meat while women, if they eat meat at all, prefer lean or poultry meat (as a result, vegetarian men can cause as much gender trouble as women eating bloody steaks). Fischer pointed out that gender-specific diet originates from historically variable social contexts as well as that eating habits are a valid strategy of doing gender. Last to speak in this session was Willemijn Ruberg (Utrecht), who critically evaluated the use of praxiography for the history of the body. Suggesting that a focus on bodily practices cannot be separated from a discursive approach, she discussed and compared praxiography against the background of other theories and approaches from sociology focussing on practices.

Session 6 had a focus on "Mediated Bodies & 'Body Language'". Ines Braune (Marburg) dealt with parkour as an urban and media discourse. Besides performances on the street, perceiving any barriers and hindrances as a challenge to overcome by using only one's bodily and mental capacities, parkour is also performed in video clips available on the internet. The first refers to locally embedded processes of everyday actions, the latter to extraordinary images distributed globally. Both exemplify the complex constructedness of the body as an artefact. Subsequently, Anita Wohlmann (Mainz) examined examples from the 'Quantified Self' blog where people acquire "self-knowledge through numbers". While in online environments the materiality of the body often is marginalized, members of the 'Quantified Self' community construct their identities through the stories they tell about their

bodies. Instead of words, they rely on numbers and statistics. These 'self-trackers' offer new approaches to virtual identities and the construction of bodies by measuring, counting and monitoring. Roberta Raffaetà (Trento) presented the results of an empirical research on the reformation of apprenticeship for ski teachers. She illustrated how the development of new linguistic practices helps to communicate unexplored body-senses assemblages and contributes to expand the potential to learn new bodily figurations. Finally, Katrin Amelang (Göttingen) focused on organs as both material and cultural objects with different meanings, practices and politics. Using the example of liver transplantation, she exposed the "newly composed body" as problematic and asked how a 'silent' organ as the liver can be seen and 'brought to speak' by physicians, liver recipients or observing ethnographers.

The second conference day finished with the Georg Forster Lecture held by Annemarie Mol (Amsterdam), asking "Where is my Body? Notes on Eating and Topology". She pointed out that in recent practice-oriented studies bodily and social elements are perceived as acting together. From the perspective of 'my body' as an individual body, she discussed topological configurations and perspectives from economics and nutrition sciences.

Session 7 made "Body Functions: Living & Dying" the subject. David Linton (New York) started with an impressive examination of the social process in which men and women construct menstruation's meaning. Contemporary Western societies practice a kind of menstrual segregation by insisting on secrecy and discretion, making women's bleeding bodies both material, in a literal sense, and immaterial, in a cultural sense. Lisa Malich (Berlin) gave an overview of her research on the history of the endocrinological model of pregnancy, referring to newspaper articles, advice books and package inserts of medication. Malich emphasised the importance of the development of the contraceptive pill on the one hand and the pregnancy test kit on the other. From this perspective, the pregnant body can be regarded as part of material culture, shaped by economic and biomedical networks as well as by practices and discourses. 'Dying as practice' was brought into question by Thorsten Benkel (Frankfurt a. M.). Against the background of changing sepulchral culture, he outlined the particular perception of death and liveliness and asked if the transformation from living to dead body coincides with the discharge of a person from society. The dead body becomes invisible when carried to its grave, but there are several means of making it visible at the same time, such as pictures, death masks or funerary monuments. With this, the dead keep a social efficacy.

Finally, Session 8 centred on "Interventions: Clinics and their Bodies". Sandra Bärnreuther (Heidelberg) opened the session with a report on her ethnographic fieldwork in In-Vitro fertilisation clinics in India. She focussed on the patient's body as site, instrument and medium of communicative practices during the process of superovulation, arguing that these acts of communication not only make the body audible, visible and knowable, but also constitute processes of enactment, concerning the question of bodies generated by practices of reproductive medicine. Edmund Coleman-Fountain (Newcastle) discussed the experiences of children with cerebral palsy who had to submit medical procedures like multiple surgeries, wearing splints, regular physiotherapy and frequent injections of chemicals. These interventions reshape the child's body, but also bring scarring, pain and discomfort. By reaching adulthood, these procedures are displaced by self-intervention through diet, exercise, clothing and technologies. Modes of intervention and self-intervention in childhood and young adulthood lead to different kinds of body artefacts and different sets of relationships, priorities and emotional investment. The final speaker in this session was Stefan Reinsch (Berlin), who introduced an approach focussing not only hospital settings, but which also involves medical engineered bodies once they leave the hospital. By using the example of adolescents with cystic fibrosis, material and temporal aspects of the body, tied together with expert knowledge, medical devices, therapeutic practice and social relationships, were discussed.

The conference finished with the last keynote talk by Thomas Alkemeyer and Matthias Michaeler (Oldenburg) on the systematic production of 'tuned bodies', using the example of volleyball training. Within the socio-material arrangements of training sessions, bodies are made observable, rearranged and reconfigured, so they can function as competent carrier medium of practical team play.

The conference showed impressively that there are multiple approaches to an understanding of the human body as material culture. Emphasis was on the social sciences, which, however, also frequently took body-centred natural sciences into account. All presentations, irrespective of their (sometimes highly) specialized field of interest and the body 'layer' they were concerned with – entire bodies, body parts, collective bodies etc. – had one thing in common: they all disclosed that social concepts and constructions such as gender, identity, in/dividuality or status all build upon the human body and the practices related to it.

While Prehistoric Archaeology already engaged in many of these topics, it still needs to be discussed how these social constructions are *embodied*, how they pertain to the human body. This is all the more surprising since human bodies are ubiquitous in the archaeological record: they are present not only in graves as a key category of the discipline, but also in settlements and various non-sepulchral ritual contexts. Moreover, both the body and its treatment serve as a criterion not only of social construction but also of archaeological classification, such as 'inhumation', 'cremation' or 'deviant burial'. Thus, from an archaeological point of view, we can and should build on these approaches and discussions, viewing the body as an essential subject, as both artefact and medium of social practices. Even though the 'fragmentedness' of prehistoric bodies is obvious, the body's materiality constitutes an appropriate access for Prehistoric Archaeology to contribute to this body-discourse and to deal with the significance of the human body as origin and very basis for all social practice. Yet, the question remains how a concept of the body can be generated that is practical for archaeological research. The human body as subject of research in Prehistoric Archaeology certainly poses a challenge. A number of publications from UK and US archaeologists attempt to meet this challenge since the 1990s, while the topic lacked responses in Central European archaeology. As studies of the social order of any society have to take the material embodiment of the social into account, conferences like the Mainz Symposium should be regarded as an opportunity to connect Prehistoric Archaeology with a contemporary and central discourse in the cultural sciences, focussing on the body as part of material culture.