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Renovating Body and Space

Wade Tillett

Abstract

In this article, the author has renamed the complicated conglomeration of the lived experience of the body-space as an "embody". An embody includes a body schema, extensions to that body schema, peripersonal space, space, and more — a sort of working map of self and world. An embody continually changes definition in interaction with culture, (architectural) habitats, clothes, tools, vehicles, others, etc. Multiple embodies are often simultaneously deployed. Through vignettes and poetic prose, this project explores how the embody of daily experiences is composed. What is this embody of embodied experience? What forms of bodies and spaces does it take up? How are they constructed? What can they do?

While this project initially took up body space as its topic, it became clear that the lived experience of body and space can not be neatly tied to the physical realm those terms seems to imply. First, neither body nor space is separate or predetermined. Further, the influences on the experience of body and space extend to the cultural and the imaginary. Here, I have renamed the complicated conglomeration of the lived experience of the body-space as an "embody". An embody includes a body schema ("the felt experience of your body" (Blakeslee, 2007, p. 32)), extensions to that body schema, peripersonal space, space, and more — a sort of working map of self and world. An embody continually changes definition in interaction with culture, (architectural) habitats, clothes, tools, vehicles, others, etc. Multiple embodies are often simultaneously deployed, as for instance, when one drives a car and both takes up the boundaries and possibilities (space) of the car and concurrently retains some of the boundaries and possibilities of the "natural" body. I make a turn and drink out of a straw at the same time. I am a steering-wheel turning, engine accelerating, four wheel moving, elbow pivoting, hand clasping, straw sucking assemblage. My experienced embodies are all of these and more. Embodies are made of embodies. They are shuffled and recomposed. They are continually modified. They are, like the "self... fundamentally fragmented, divided, or nonunified" (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991, xvii).

While much has been written about embodied experience, this project explores how the embody of those experiences is composed. What is this embody of embodied experience? What forms of bodies and spaces does it take up? How are they constructed? What can they do?

Those are vast questions, including a large swath of life as we know it. Because of this, here I take a tentative approach that explores different embody structures through vignettes and poetic prose (See Barone & Eisner, 1998 on arts-based methods). The attempt is not to nail down the exact composition of embodies, but rather to open an inquiry and inspire a sense of wonder and awe of the amazing flexibility we employ in day-to-day living in navigating fractured, multiple body-worlds. This exploration is recursive; it further informs daily interactions of our embodies (Benjamin, 1979; Bergson, 1913/1998; Said, 1975; Schwab, 1978). Further still, I see the moment-by-moment actions we take on embodies as research in and of itself (Debord, 1961; Denzin, 2003; Pelias, 1999). To further encourage a moment-by-moment awareness of your own embody as a reader, I have given instructions for you to perform in brackets <> as you read along.

In my youth I thought perhaps they would join us, that we had broken the spell wide open. But they had made their choice and they stuck to it, crowded under the awnings and doorways and covered alleyways, borrowing our bodies. For we were beautiful and they all became us, each one. And in those gazes we were multiplied, for we used them as well, their eyes to see our bodies beautiful and wet and bold, sculpted tight by clinging clothes, glistening. We were naked to us through them. Walking boldly, happily, laughingly, perhaps putting on a bit of a show as the two-man parade, the one-young-couple-in-love parade. Holding hands and splashing puddles and clothes clinging, clinging to her breasts. Her jean blue wet flesh. A wave of hushed look-at-thats preceding, a bubble in the rain of

Illustration



1: Shutter speed makes some body-spaces seem more defined than others.

Illustration



2: Here, the embody doubles; the retina (lens) of the camera at the point of a triangular space attempts to mirror the retina (eyes) at the wide end of the triangle.

bodies projected and multiplied and made one, one here and now embracing this slick cool warmth. Body shaped gaps in the rain moving through, yes we are the womb of the water, it parts for us like the people and their gaze, running over each curve further defined. Yes. Yes. A body that is the gap of displacement. A body of two bodies connected boldly displacing. Like wind rushes past the car moving forward, here we part the rushing water down - we, we are ascending.

My embodies are cast in the rain and in the gaze. My embodies are not simply mine. My embodies are a site of social inscription.

<With your hands, outline the space that you expect a stranger to consider yours.>

The camera opens a bubble within the crowd. Pedestrians circle around the line from lens to subject, avoiding intersecting the invisible camera-to-subject line. An ellipse, camera and tourist as radii.

As I walk down the street, I hear her. "Help the lady" she says, referring to herself in the third person. She is seeing herself through us, intoning our conscience.

My eyes avoid contact. I pretend not to be here. My embodies split themselves and claim an absence, a lack of agency, while simultaneously propelling me down the street.

Later, I see him on the corner. No, I only see the sign, then I see him. He is rolled up in a ball on his feet, hiding his self, his body, his face. Only the sign is visible really, facing out from hands extending from a newspaper box, low to the

Illustration



3: An embody posture extends back from a point where the conflicting directions of the current and the net meet.

Illustration

4: An embody edge between stasis and movement.

Illustration

5: The crowded boat deck marks a significant difference from the empty lake, creating a remarkably well-defined embody edge. Also of interest here is the many directions of gazes and posture despite all participants moving geographically together in a larger shared embody.

ground. The sign: "help me. I'm homeless. Iraq war vet." An ID is taped to the lower right to support his claim.

His embodies are not simply his. His embodies overlap, infringe, demand to become part of mine.

Swarm, flock, horde, army. To be both one and many. A conga line. A Chinese dragon. Many bodies, one body. Arcs, movements, possibilities, missed connections, embraces, compositions, choreographies. Bodies come together with other bodies. Spaces become one space. Bodyspaces merge, amplify. Yes, sex, but beyond that - sex as culture. Habit, culture, Taylorism, dance, the war machine.

My embodies are part of a larger embody; they are members.

My embodies are partial. They are incomplete.

<Use both hands to describe the social forces acting on the space you are in right now.>

Prior to a line of the building plan being drawn on paper, the desired (and forbidden) actions of the users within that building are described in the architectural program — a list of the functions that the space is to facilitate (in education the parallel is called the curriculum). The architectural control or influence of user activity, when done effectively, looks and feels natural by foregrounding the allowed activity while backgrounding the forbidden. The architectural program, once built, can be inferred through analysis. For example, a park bench which features an "armrest" in the middle is likely designed to allow sitting but prevent lying down. The contours of the embody are affected; the bench, when used as designed, allows one to sit facing a certain direction thus directing the body space (including gaze) towards one area and away from another. A user of a bench, then, may conform to this (hidden) curriculum. The embody is passive yet

vertical, located in a certain predetermined location, facing a predetermined vista.

The way in which the embody is conceived affects the design of the space, while the design of a space affects the way in which the embody is conceived.

My embodies are sculpted by forces, many of which I don't even notice.

<Sit in your chair in a different way than the designer planned.>

A distinct circle of controlled destruction appears visibly at the outside radius of an invisible forcefield that exists at the end of the stem of modified wishbone shape. One fork of the wishbone exists mainly as a pivot, while the other fork can be shortened or lengthened and/or moved left or right in an arc in order to direct the circle horizontally and vertically. If the circle is kept fairly parallel to the ground, and slightly above it, the random lengths of the plants are cut off to a uniform length above the ground, allowing them to live within a defined horizontal plane.

But, that doesn't really describe what it is like to inhabit the body-space of weed-whipping my backyard last night. It is true, the main appendage is an invisible circle. Perhaps that is the location of the consciousness, the center or the focus. The sweep of the wishbone arms and the movement of my feet are barely conscious. I think of the circle moving and it moves; sometimes that is so immediate it seems not

to go in order, but simultaneously. And all of that requires so little brainpower that most of the time thoughts are trampling through... a circle in a sweeping arc hovering above the ground and a mind floating where it will. Maintenance is the constant adjustment to the groundplane and the line between the cut and uncut, with feedback coming from that line, the height of the cut, radius of the circle, and the speed of the engine... organs of an embody I conceive in order to accomplish the task of cutting weeds.

My embodies are composed of parts and extensions.

<Pick up a different tool and notice how not only your body schema changes, but so do the possibilities of the space around you — according to the affordances of the tool.>

I lift off the heavy steel top. It is 2 foot by 2 foot, with 2 handles. Secured down with a chain that requires you to find the link where you turn your fingers on a small nut that opens the link. The previous owner installed it, replacing the shoddy wooden top that had two concrete blocks holding it down. We had warned the kids not to stand on it. Apparently our warning was taken more sternly than we intended. Brittney had nightmares about falling in the poophole. So it was nice of the owner to install the top, even though we didn't ask her to after the inspection. The inspector, also a contractor, told us it couldn't handle 5 people and would overflow almost immediately. The liquid level is the problem, he said, in response to my suggestion we have it pumped. You will be putting 500, no 2000, gallons in there a day. The leechfield won't handle it and you will have it backed up and a mess. Well, he might just be trying to drum up some work, I told our agent on the phone, hoping to comfort myself. And so now I tie a piece of broken clothesline on an old brick with three holes in it. I lower it down to just touch the liquid - liquid sludge. Floaters and toilet paper. I put my thumb where the line meets the top of the concrete and lift out the brick, swing it to the ground, measure from thumb to bottom of the brick. 53". And then I do the same to the bottom, lowering down through the liquid sludge until I feel the brick tip to its side on the soft shit below. 81". And then I get the hose going and wash the line and the brick. Replace the cover. Screw the nut back on. Wash my hands.

My embodies are extended, disjointed, intermittent. My embodies extend beyond my feeling of self.

<What parts of your embodies have you recently left behind? Where are they now? Go back and check on them.>

Cave, shelter, home, womb, stomach, mouth, orifice. The ear shapes space to direct sound waves in. The eyes are spheres of filtered light.

My embodies are layers upon layers of space, filtered.

Negative body space. Filling of space. Intercourse. Access to another's body-space.

<Put something in a body opening.>

Surgery constricts a stomach in order to modify an overall body.

My embodies are in their use; they must be maintained.

"It is then right to say that what we do depends on who we are; but it is necessary to add also that we are, to a certain extent, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually" (Bergson, 1913/1998, p. 7).

My embodies are real. What happens to my embodies is real. That is what I say.

My embodies are finite, a disruption in the infinite. My embodies are sin, a departure from the ideal. My embodies are a prison.

<How does your embody differ from your ideal embody right now? Act out what the ideal would look like.>

In the morning, I prop up on an arm and watch the train go by. Sometimes with my glasses on. Sometimes without.

Today I attempted to match what it looks like without my eyeglasses by using the camera. I am near-sighted. After experimenting with the focus and f-stop, I found that, focused closest to me, an f-stop of around 8.0 produced an image that is close to what I saw without glasses on. Of course, the difference in body-space with such a significant prescription is considerable. Without my glasses on, the world becomes an impressionist painting. Large sections of hues and shades make up a composition that can move. Forms are seen more as part of a whole rather than diving into the details of a particular object. The individual object becomes somewhat attention-resistant, taking a place within the shapes.

My embodies filter, translate, magnify.

<Use a tool for something other than its proper use.>

The "filter bubble" is the personalized sense of reality fed to me through a google search based on my past searches. I wear glasses to see more clearly. I slow down when I see a cop. People pretend to work around the boss, and talk about the assignment around the teacher. I'm a teacher. The limits of my embody can not be teased out from this exterior. There are effects, ripples, point-to-point connections. There are social and physical constructions that we walk within. My whole family walks on the same wooden floor, but I sink into the snow deeper than my son.

My embodies include exterior augmentations. My embodies modify and are modified. A chainsaw.

My elbows have grown out beyond and forward, at the end of each is a large plastic scooped hand. Each new hand moves parallel to my elbow, like a bicycle pedal, right elbow forward and up, left elbow back and down, scooping resistance out of the plane of water, propelling my plastic pod trunk forward. That is pretty much the extent of the vehicle-body, alternating scoops grabbing the water and pulling the pod forward. I hear the disturbances of the water, the locusts, even a hoot owl in the middle of the afternoon. But the disturbances of the water plane are not just from my paddles, I am a moving cloud of disturbance. Stones throws in all directions things surface and leave ripples indicating their direction away from me – panfish, larger fish, and even things larger still that I never get a good look at. Looking below the surface, I can see the cloud of

disturbance moving with me, pushing things away from me. The panfish darting away from the sight of the hull, or from my shadow, or the sound of the paddles or the hull brushing against the seaweed. I am not a thing; I am an intersection of forces peeping out, influencing, being influenced.

My embodies have ripples, echoes.

<What changes extend out from you? Try to sneak up in order to see a space without the modifications of your presence.>

I am casting the circle. My embodies exists in a bubble of belief, in a belief-landscape. My embodies are sacred.

A helicopter produces a difference in air pressure allowing the vehicle to move up/down/forward/backward via a rotating mechanism. A central point separates yet links the production of difference via the rotary blades from the pod which is also linked in order to both control and benefit from the effects of the air pressure differential, yet isolate and separate it from its production and disruption. Via a mechanism, certain effects of difference are connected to the pilot, while other effects are dispersed. The engine produces continued differential in air pressure which allows for movement of that engine within its landscape.

My embodies produce and use difference. They propel themselves. They channel, filter, isolate, and hang on. My embodies are the product of difference.

<Identify an area of separation-connection between your body-space and surrounding space. What possibilities are afforded? Change the configuration and possibilities by modifying your embody in some way.>

To draw is to extend the eyes with the hand. A finite capture process places feedback back into the in-finite. The pen nibs channel ink to a point. I am that point, cutting a swath of finite from the in-finite processing and placing it back.

Light follows me. It is emitted from me. Into the rooms, the switches are flicked and the lights turn on. The torch is carried. The observer affects the observed. Sometimes, we devise a holder for the torch. Our embody separates, re-produces, becomes a different level. The wall is washed in light now. We paint in the caves. With extended daylight and newly freed hands.

My embodies become embedded. My embodies becomes less embodied, disembodied.

<Think of a change you have made to your environment today. Go back and modify or undo that change.>

An interview on the radio asked a one hundred year old woman what was the most amazing change she had seen in her years of life. She answered, "The telephone."

My embodies are dislodged. My embodies undergo radical shifts and recompose themselves differently.

I leave a message. I make a mark to leave a piece of me here, for later. My embodies are constructed of discontinuities.

<Write something on a scrap of paper. Put it somewhere where you will find it later.>

To curate is to separate the body-space from the continuity that exists between episodes. To curate is to create a space between episodes, to propose a new continuity to be inhabited, to program. The discontinuity gives shape to objects, foregrounding them while backgrounding the inhabited space created. The experience is concealed as an act of looking at.

The discontinuities of this very text are bridged by you, the reader.

I sleep. I forget. My embodies are discontinuous, discordant, contradictory.

And yet, I experience a continuity. My embodies are continually modified. They are plastic. My embodies self-regenerate. I "have to keep enough of the organism for it to reform each dawn" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 160).

Petals, inside out exposing the new, fresh, tender: womb - cord - body - womb - cord - body. I feel this folding unfolding. Between versions, iterations... not cast-off, not abandoned, but casting off, abandoning. I was wrong you see – the shell is not abandoned. The bed spread is turned down.

My embodies are movement, action, lateral jumps. My embodies are potential movement, imagined action.

<When you are done reading this, switch to a different configuration of embodies. What changed? What allowed you to navigate the change?>

We must explore our embodies here, now. What embodies are possible? What new ones can we create? What shall they be?

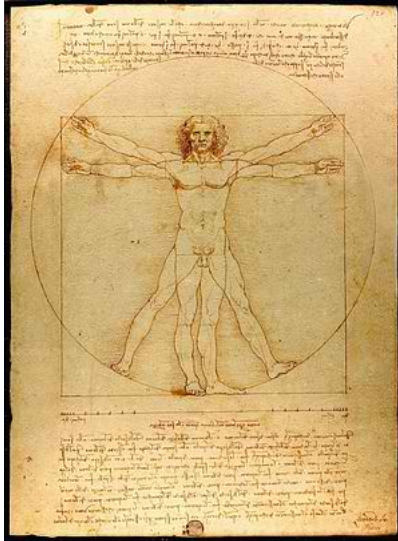
Here. Now. A stepladder. A silence. A heckler. To converge the horizon and the vision. We are escaping, continually escaping. Displacements, slippages.

What of the overflow, the simultaneous, the glance, the assumed, the forgotten?

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987, p. 161)

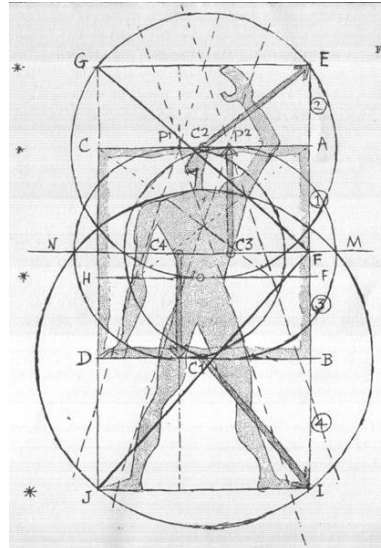
Author's note: This research did not occur in a vacuum. Because of the vast territory included by embodiment, body, and space, I provide here a sampling of literature that has helped inspire this work and might interest the reader for further study.

Illustration



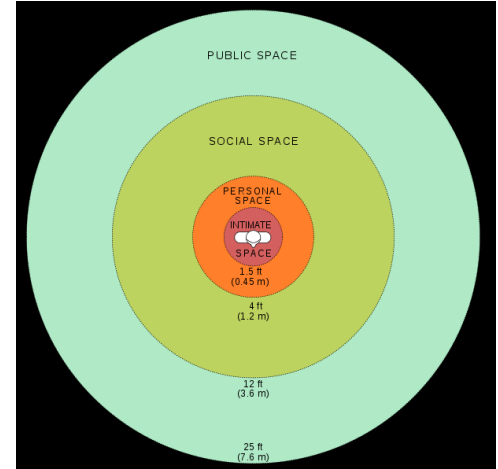
6: Vitruvian Man by Leonardo da Vinci (Wikipedia, c.1487/2012)

Illustration



7: Le Corbusier's Modulor Man (Flatman, c.1943/2005)

Illustration



8: Diagram of Edward T. Hall's personal reaction bubbles (1966), showing radius in feet (WebHamster, 2009).

The connection of body and space is a primary concern of architectural theory throughout history. The Vitruvian Man, a conception of the body that Leonardo da Vinci based on the 1st century BC Roman architect Vitruvius, features both a square and circle surrounding the male body. The Modulor Man by architect Le Corbusier also features squares and circles, along with golden rectangles and spirals. These conceptions bring to mind the “personal space” described by anthropologist of space Edward T. Hall (1966), in which a series of circles radiate out from an individual which define types of personal space: intimate is closest, then personal, social, and finally public.

Surprisingly similar to the geometry of the Vitruvian and Modulor Man and Hall's personal space diagram are a few recent artist conceptions such as the wide-metal-waist of Vivian Puxian's (2009) *Personal Space*, the hula-hoop-waist of Nathan Destro's *Personal Space Protector* (Szabla, 2010), and even the more interactive versions such as the instant hoop-skirt-like *Personal Space Activator* (Granjon & Gazzola, 2012). Alternative geometries include the square tape-wrapped spaces of *Illegal Art* (2006) and the spike-inflating *Personal Space Suit* of Terence Argo (2006). Less literally, Yoko Ono's *Cut Piece*, in which she invites the audience to cut off pieces of her clothes, and Marina Abramovic's *Rhythm 0*, in which she invites the audience to use a feather, scalpel, paint, gun, and bullet as she remained passive, bring forth questions of the limits of the body in public space (Phelan, 2007). *Tilted arc* by Richard Serra put a huge piece of steel in the way of many pedestrians, and was eventually removed. *The inflatable wall* of Temporary Services (2002) also raised the question of who gets to do what in public space. Tehching Hsieh spent a year in a cage, and another year tied to Linda Montano by 8 foot of rope without touching

her. More abstractly, Cubism attempted to breakdown space itself.

In architecture, the secretive personal spaces of Adolph Loos provided lush interiors with stark exteriors (Cacciari, 1993) while the hyper-utopian personal spaces of Superstudio and Archigram and the parasitic spaces of Lebbeus Woods (1992; also see Serres, 1980/2007) take their conceptions to the level of hyperbole.

Of course, body-space conceptions involve many more factors than that of architect and user. Body-space depends on culture and discourse, geography, socioeconomic status, gender, personality, and more. Implicit body-space conceptions accompany nearly all aspects of life, and therefore nearly all aspects of study. Making these conceptions explicit and/or malleable has a rich history in many disciplines.

Illustration



9: Destro's Personal Space Protector (Szabla, 2010)

Illustration



10: Personal Space by Illegal Art (2006)

The political construction of space is taken up by innumerable theorists (Castoriadis, 1992; Lefebvre, 1991; Whitlock, 2007). Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1995) examines the spatial prerogatives of the prison and the subjectivity implied by discipline. De Certeau (1984) looked at the subjectivities involved in daily life practices within public space.

Conceptions of object and space (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Kitchin and Dodge, 2007; Latour, 1993, 2003; Shields, 2013) and explorations of the body and embodiment (Butler, 1993; Grosz, 1994; Haraway, 1985/1990; Hayles, 1999; Foster, 1983; Manning, 2013; Miller, 2005; Serres 1980/2007; Varela, et. al, 1991) indicate that the definition of body and space are not as simple as they might appear. Bergson (1913/1998), Deleuze & Guattari (1988), Virilio (1995), and Ellsworth (2005) all discuss the mutual genesis of body and space.

In my own prior work, body-space has been a consistent theme of inquiry. My architectural thesis featured both a space that would profile and personalize based on the user regardless of their geographical location, or optionally, a body modified to provide the illusion of personalized body-space via implants in sensory organs (author, 1998). My performance art has involved participants in physically manipulating the space around them (author, 1996), or in re-conceiving the space of a neighborhood based on the reconception of body by carrying a specific tool (author, 2004). In my writing, I have deconstructed the architectural space and subjectivity implied as well as how these conceptions affect what counts as real (author, 2011). I attempt to foreground the location and conception of the researcher in my research.

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