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EMBODIED DISCOURSE, EMBODIED PRACTICE

The Body as Text, Medium,
and Testimony in Japan

Edited by
Christopher Craig and Ajjana Thairungroj

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CHRISTOPHER CRAIG¹
FOREWORD
CATCHING BODIES

“If a body catch a body, coming through the rye.”
J.D. Salinger, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951)

The quote above, as well as the Robert Burns poem from which it is inexpertly borrowed, appears at two points in the journey of the main character of the novel *Catcher in the Rye*. It takes up very little textual real estate, but it hits upon themes so central to the work as to give it its title. In the first instance, Holden Caulfield recalls following behind a family whose small child is focused on pretending to walk in an absolute straight line while singing the line absent-mindedly, his parents oblivious and absorbed in conversation. It appears again when Holden relates an elaborate fantasy he has constructed in relation to the line when he is informed that he has misremembered the Robert Burns lyric “If a body find a body, coming through the rye.”

The mobilizing of the quotation does more than just assign a key conceptual position to the word “body” and a direct connection to the novel’s title. The situating of the line in the narrative and the actions, both real and imagined, that are connected to it betray a core concern with issues of embodiment in action and speech, the theme of the current volume. The child accompanying his parents down the sidewalk is engaged in pretending to be a tightrope walker, his physical motions so dedicated to this embodiment that Holden immediately recognizes

what the boy is doing. Holden's fantasy connected with catching bodies in the rye demonstrates similar characteristics. He relates to his sister his role in the vision that the lyric brings unbidden to his brain, describing his taking the form of a hero at the edge of a cliff hidden in a field of rye, catching running and playing children before they fall to their deaths. Together, these fantasies represent crystallizations of major themes presented in the novel, themselves accomplishing something not unlike an embodiment of the book's central ideas.

The chapters that follow this foreword go beyond general musings on the nature of bodies and embodiment to focus on how conceptions and concerns about these elements have appeared and evolved in Japan.² In Japan, as in everywhere else in the world, the human body, its malleability, its modes of existing in the world, and related ideas have been subject to concerted examination from concerns rooted in as wide a variety of fields as philosophy, religion, psychology, literature and other creative media, fine arts, social sciences, and medicine, among many others. The historical trajectory of human civilization in Japan has provided a backdrop for particular understandings of the practices and discourses connected to bodies and embodiment. Evolving social, political, linguistic, and religious structures have helped shape how people understand human existence, the relationships between the ideal and the carnal, the range of meanings associated with the body, and processes of being and becoming.

The present volume presents a wide-ranging discussion of bodies and embodiment in Japan. The fourteen chapters that follow, organized into six sections, apply a diverse range of methodological approaches to the subject, producing in sum a multifaceted exploration of a complex and compelling topic. The first section, "Japanese Embodiment," is comprised of a single chapter. In "Japanese Perspectives on Embodied Aspects of Intersubjectivity", Marton Szemerey provides a useful roadmap for the studies that follow with a focused examination of bodily

2 While the present author and editor read *Catcher in the Rye* during his first stay in Japan nearly 30 years ago, it is not likely that this connection also exists for many other people.

performance and individual and collective identities in the Japanese context that draws upon the fields of philosophy, social theory, and religious studies.

“Bodies and Gender, Expression and Restriction” is the theme of the second section, which collects three chapters investigating aspects of gender, bodies, performance, and law. “Occupying Spaces and Disintegrating Bodies” by Makishima Chisato applies anthropological and performance studies lenses to drag shows in Tokyo, suggesting a focus on aesthetic and bodily performance as a new way of examining this art form and its complicated connections with bodies and identity. A different kind of performance is the focus of Ludovica Marincioni’s chapter, “Rethinking Bodies and Performing Femininity in Early 20th Century *kabuki*: Hasegawa Shigure and the Actress Debate,” which explores the contestations and renegotiations that surrounded gender and acting in the *kabuki* and Western dramatic theaters of the early 20th century. The section closes with Lyman Gamberton’s “Fearing Fertility: Eugenics Laws and Biopolitical Citizenship in Japan,” presenting a historical examination of sterilization laws in Japan restricting the reproductive and personal autonomy of transgender people and the profound links of these to earlier eugenics laws directed at the disabled.

Part III of the book is devoted to “Myth, Poetry, and Embodiment by Word,” bringing together research on poetry, translation, and linguistics in Japan. Joshua M. Mostow leads off with “Embodied Poems: Waka and the Human Figure,” examining *byōbu-uta*, or screen poems, in which poets would assume the roles of figures in landscape paintings and compose verses from their perspectives. Poetry is again the subject of the following chapter, “The Representation of ‘*kan*’ in *Kokin wakashū*: Taking the Relevance of Chinese Poetry Themed on ‘*Tanabata*’” by Ding Shuwen, which traces the influence of classical Chinese poetry on language and symbolic significations attached in Japan to an enduring legend of star-crossed lovers. Asumi Suzuki’s “Awareness of the Body’s Internal State Supports the Appropriate Use of Socio-Emotional Linguistic Markers: Focusing on Japanese Utterance-Final Particles” completes

the section with a neurolinguistic analysis of the links between emphatic particles in Japanese and the bodily and emotional states of speakers.

“Bodies on Display” forms the theme of the fourth part, and is comprised of works that consider bodies and embodiment through costumes, artistic depictions, and performative sport. “To Worship the Human Body: Léon Bakst, Japonism, and the Cataclysm in the Art of Fashion” by Susanne Marten-Finnis opens the section, offering a look at the importance of both Japanese costumes and fashion and Russian stage designer Léon Bakst at the moment that fashion began to be accepted by the European art world. Ozaki Akihiro’s “The Joy of the Fleeting: Shunga, Landscape, and the Reconfiguration of Vision from Courbet to Modernism” follows, arguing that the introduction of erotic Japanese woodblock prints to Europe in the late 19th century transformed the ways that Western artists thought about bodies, time, and space. Finally, Yabu Kōtarō and Andreas Niehaus close with “Performing Modernities in the Ring: Catch Wrestling, *sumō*, and Kōdōkan *jūdō* as Mirror of Contesting National Bodies,” examining the different and competing idealized forms of masculinity and athleticism that were expressed in the bodies of American and Japanese combat sports athletes meeting at a sequence of showcase events in Japan in 1921.

Part V is titled “Unbodied by Modernity” and presents a pair of chapters exploring works of modern Japanese literature that problematize the body. The first of these is Matilde Mastrangelo’s “From Romanticism to *junshi*: Mori Ōgai’s Different Approaches to Narrating the Body,” a work that examines the body, suffering, and death in the author’s writings that point towards an unknowability of these in the remote past in contrast with widespread feelings of alienation from one’s own body in the author’s own time. This alienation is also a central concern of Giuseppe Strippoli’s “The Body as Technoscientific Instrument in Yumeno Kyūsaku’s ‘Ningen *rekōdo*,’” an exploration of how anxieties regarding the modern world and its politics combined with developments in genre literature in the creation of the novella’s titular and nearly entirely dehumanized ‘human record.’

The volume ends with the single-chapter Part VI, “Body and Soul.” In “Acceptance and Rejection of Christianity in Premodern Japan,” Aldo Tollini examines the reasons – both bodily and spiritual – for different receptions in the long history of Japanese contact with Christianity, including a tale of a European missionary who came to embody the position of an anti-Christian Buddhist.

Together, the works gathered in this volume cover an impressively wide range of experiences with and conceptions of embodiment in Japan, but common threads also emerge. One of these is the movement of related ideas across national and regional borders. Concepts related to the body and its ways of coming into being traveled into, out of, and across Japan through religion, poetry, fashion, performance, sport, art, and literature. A second through-line in the anthology exists in the experiences of alienation and loss in connection to the body. Oppressive laws, calcified and normative ideas about femininity and masculinity, and anxieties connected with 20th-century modernity all introduced disjunctures between identity and bodily existence while often inhibiting subjectivity and autonomy. Finally, a deep and abiding connection between aesthetic expression and the human body bridges the chapters of the book. Whether in *kabuki* plays, Western drama, and drag shows; *waka* poetry, Chinese verse, and dystopian science fiction; or erotic art, avant garde fashion, and the spectacle of professional wrestling; the body and varied forms of embodiment both inspired aesthetic creativity and were defined by it.

Just as Holden Caulfield’s misrememberings of old poems and idle musings about abstract heroism use brief flashes to illustrate the central themes of *Catcher in the Rye*, so too do the concepts of discourses and practices of embodiment in Japan provide a means of provoking discussions ranging across periods and subjects while tying them together in previously unexamined ways. It is the editors’ hope that this volume will inspire further investigations of bodies and embodiment in the Japanese context and produce new insights that can be applied to scholarship far and wide.

