

Dear Hanna

When I think about the body and language François Rabelais (french monk, 1483–1553) comes to mind. His epic novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel* contains bodies that do not fit, that shit and come apart on the page, huge bodies, hungry bodies —bodies that are not the sum of their parts, that actually can't be described.

In one section, the giant Gargantua sends an emissary to a small island to recount his enemy (who he has never seen) to him —another giant called Shrovetide. In doing so, the emissary makes endless lists of similes, starting from the most internal organs, then the skeleton, then the skin, then the emotions, then finally describing how Shrovetide's body moves through the world. The similes themselves are epically strange. To me, they push metaphor to its outer possibilities...

We might write and then tell each other stories from our actual guts.

For example:

His shoulders, like a hand-barrow.

His navel, like a cymbal.

His arms, like a riding-hood.

His groin, like a minced pie.

His fingers, like a brotherhood's andirons.

His member, like a slipper.

His purse, like an oil cruet.

His genitals, like a joiner's planer.

(It goes on and on and on...)

Part of what's so exciting to me about this is that the metaphors are pushed so far against meaning that they almost fall apart. PLUS, if we actually tried to draw or shape this body (groin like a minced pie AND a member like a slipper??), it would be impossible to fashion. It's multiple, disparate, it runs in every direction....

it's fully envisioned but also unknowable in that we know no body like that,
it doesn't fit...

Here the body is the container that no longer contains.
Or can't contain.

The feint is that language is being used to "describe" but seems to be proving it's own inability to function in this most pedestrian way.

Now of course I'm thinking of what you said to me:

We might engage in a series of translations... from language to flesh to language (there's a game I like that gets really strange when you try to do this)...

"Your body is a book of thoughts that cannot be read in its entirety." "Your body is a book of thoughts that cannot be read in its entirety." "Your body is a book of thoughts that cannot be read in its entirety."

(Waldrop)

And again, back to your initial question: about excavating the body container and what happens between the interior and the surface, where distrust... blooms?

A Reiki teacher of mine once encouraged me to bypass the brain (source of so much trouble) and literally "write from the gut — tell the story of your liver or internal organs."

Eileen Myles said writing is a problem bc it keeps the brain right at the place it judges itself.

Bataille said cut off the head because it gets in the way of what needs to come out of the neck.

With you I want to play here—in language AND in the body, in the inevitable failure (or refusal) of language to describe what is not, in the end, a lingual experience at all.

Can I say my experience of the body to you?
Can you say yours to me? Or what about when
my head describes a body that my eyes
do not (cannot) see?

We might think in
different physical
positions and see
which words come
out, if any. For
instance upside
down. Or touching
each other.

We might leave
feeling as if we
had formed one
motley body
together or as if
we have no body
at all?

Can we really each only have one body?
Why do we ever pretend it's discrete?

In other words, could we, together, make a way to re-purpose language, to use it as Rabelais does, as a way to generate an unruly multiplicity—an experience with language that refuses the body's colonization... that refuses to collapse into a normative experience, that refuses to—in any way—behave?

You have told me that my work needs to be choreographic..., that you invite non-choreographers expressly.

What's the tongue doing in the mouth or the words in the adrenaline glands or organs or blood?

As you know, I am a writer. So my medium is language. Recently, in a conversation with painter Amy Sillman, I said something like: "I have a hard time with speaking, with coming into language." I followed by saying that this might be difficult for me, even eventually insurmountable, since, writers by definition use words. Instead she gave examples of painters who are not masters of their material...artists who make what might seem like an obstacle, or stutter, in their artistic gesture the subject of their work.

Here, another place where language and the body struggle to meet. And yet, the body is the surface that language rises through to get released.

Somehow I need the body (ies) and I need language.

I do not want to be scared of this contradiction.

Love, Jess