

Le sternum brûle la plèvre

La plèvre, contractée, étouffe les poumons.

L'air pleut en escarbilles sur l'estomac.

Un acide coule le long des vertèbres et dévore les racines du ventre. Tout devient blanc. Les os entassent

leur rocaille. Le regard se casse, d'un ébouillis à l'autre,

puis rampe.

En haut, dans la sinistre solitude du crâne, l'œil pend.

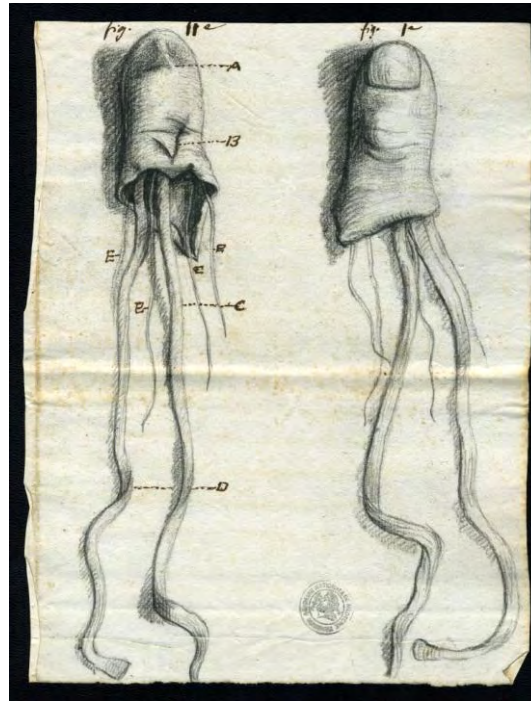
Bernard Noël, *Extraits du corps*, 1958

Eighteenth-Century Archives of the Body

'The body as an archive'

By Elena Taddia

In recent decades, following the leading work of Roy Porter, and his key assumptions that human bodies are the main signifiers of all political, medical and religious meanings, many scholars have paid growing attention to the body in terms of medical culture, power, politics, art, religion, literature, anatomy and history, right up to the most recent studies on ethical and gender issues. In addition, recent spectacular artists' installations and performances on the body (by among others Gunther Von Hagens, Christian Boltanski and Peter Greenway) keep the questioning around the body deeply rooted in our society.



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Since the assumption of the body as an instrument of power at least until the French Revolution, when the body of the king and his miraculous touch comes to an end with his decapitation, and Michel Foucault's theory of the body as something that belongs to us as the place of our 'own power', a *long* eighteenth-century clearly represents the time when the body gradually became one of the crucial questionings of our culture.

As Carol Reeds writes in a recent work dedicated to eighteenth-century bodies: "The Enlightenment preached and encouraged the quests for self-identity [...] There has been no reversal of these fundamental rights of personal freedom" (C. Reeves, p.11). In fact, from the Scientific Revolution of the previous century, when bodies were finally internally scrutinized thanks to the microscope as well as being dissected and exhibited in cabinets of curiosities, Academies and public dissections all over Europe, the *long* eighteenth century's body reflects new statements and presumptions by philosophers and scientists.

This publication brings together a selection of papers from the International Workshop 'Archives of the Body: Medieval to Early Modern' that was held at the University of

Cambridge, Hughes Hall, on 8 and 9 September 2011 and organised by Dr Elma Brenner (University of Cambridge) and Dr Elena Taddia (Centre Roland Mousnier - Paris IV Sorbonne).

At the heart of our original questioning was the notion of archives of the body, whether the body itself can serve as an archive, aiming to explore in an interdisciplinary way multiple types of evidence about human bodies and multiple sources about the body throughout different centuries with the aim of discussing new historiographical perspectives.

The papers I have chosen to assemble for this publication focus on a *long* eighteenth-century, enabling us to travel in space and time thanks, in most cases, to unpublished manuscripts, illustrations and printed sources of archives of the body.

The illustrations we can observe in Jérôme Van Wijland's essay epitomize the fact that the body remains - despite the growing progress of science - an enigma and an "object" to explore, yet to be studied objectively. The stunning - and mostly unpublished - images from the archives of the Parisian *Académie Nationale de Médecine*, known at the time as the *Académie Royale de Chirurgie* (1731-1793), an institution that was to become a reference for physicians and surgeons from all over France during the *Siècle des Philosophes*, are in most cases observations from surgeons and physicians. A large number of these illustrations are inspired by art, respecting classical canons of beauty, while others are more craftsmenlike.

Beginning in early eighteenth-century Italy, thanks to archive sources, we discover in pious baroque Genoa the miraculously cured body of a Carmelite nun, healed in 1701 through the intercession of St Teresa from a form of *vertigen tenebrosa* with subsequent progressive paralysis. At this time, the testimony of medical professionals was required to "prove" that the healing could not have been achieved by merely medical means, and secluded women's bodies were subject to examinations by male doctors, reflecting old yet fragile gender and *Ancien Régime* schemes (Paolo Fontana).

We then analyse, in a crucial period of political change for England (1709-1713, corresponding to the end of the reign of Queen Anne, the last Stuart monarch), the way in which the English elite became obsessed with physiognomy, and how the face was perceived

as a medium of the soul in popular periodical journals such as the *Tatler*, the *Spectator* and the *Guardian* in an attempt to rewrite the “body” of the coming century (Kathryn Woods).

Finally, we discover two parallel although geographically distant stories - both protagonists were born in 1779 - which take us into a more contemporary discourse: gender, sexuality and the way we can own and control our body. Catriona Seth introduces us to northern Italy under Napoleonic rule at a time when medical ideas and related translations circulated rapidly, and recounts an attempt by scientists to define the sex of a young peasant who believes herself to be a woman. The last story takes place in early nineteenth-century Chile: an unpublished diary analysed by Martín Bowen Silva introduces us to the memoirs of a young Chilean member of the Hispanic elite, representing an archive of his corporal sins and knowledge of his body.

The body thus seems to go through a *long* century: from miracles in baroque Italy, where the nun’s body is an archive of ecclesiastical enquiries that rely on medicine (Paolo Fontana), to the modernity of the self, palpable within the cases analysed by Kathryn Woods. In these journal writings, the way others look at us, at our physical appearance, is vital for building an ideal body that conforms to social conventions. The illustrations investigated by Jérôme Van Wijland themselves represent an archive of new Enlightenment approaches to the body, where science is indisputably the winner. Catriona Seth’s text pushes us further: the freedom to decide to which gender we belong, a freedom that the unfortunate Giacoma Foroni could not exercise in her/his time. As Martín Bowen Silva demonstrates, by archiving his corporal sins, the Chilean author unwittingly builds a knowledge of his body as a legacy to posterity. If some of these bodies seem to suffer from definitions and schemes imposed by dominant male conventions within society, or indeed by religion, even among the most conventional case studies science is present or in waiting.

The body as an archive is, indisputably, still centre stage in our culture as witnessed by a growing interest in corporeality. It seems to push forward specialized discourses in terms of medicine, religion, cultural history and philosophy, producing its own forms of knowledge as an archive itself. More than ever, these eighteenth-century writings reflect the notion of the body as an archive of our modern self-identity.

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