

Introduction

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Unlike marriage or whooping cough, bodies are ineluctable. One cannot ignore or be inoculated against them. Multi-purpose and polymorphous entities that we inhabit, ab/use in sundry ways and contexts, and finally bury or incinerate, bodies are, do, and “mean.” Indeed, as a site of signification the body knows few, if any, equals—a fact increasingly recognized in scholarship over the last two decades, which have witnessed the proliferation of body-studies by anthropologists, philosophers, politicians, sociologists, and commentators on film, literature, and culture. Medicine, law, and advertising, in their inimitable profession-specific fashion, also have contributed to the extensive adjustments in how the contemporary world perceives, presents, transforms, and re/constructs the body.

If Platonists devalue the physical form as something to be transcended, performers in spheres of maximal visibility—athletes, dancers, acrobats, media stars—revere it as the Alpha and Omega. The body may variously function as a weapon, an ornament, a legible text, a stimulator or simulator, a means of reproduction, and a trope, but its over-determined embeddedness in cultural genres precludes the possibility of a body devoid of associations—an innocent or neutral body. Anthropologists have acknowledged the extent to which the social body imposes constraints on our apperception of the physical body (Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* 1970): indeed, the contemporary homily that there is nothing outside of culture paradoxically tends to deny the body “nature” (*Tattoo, Torture, Mutilation, and Adornment: The Denaturalization of the Body in Culture and Text* 1992). “Embodiment” dominates virtually all investigations, whether devoted to Gogol’s zoological cast of turnip-shaped characters or to the incessant permutations in Madonna’s over-advertised body design.

Slavic studies has produced no monograph on the body. The only volume devoted to the topic is the milestone collection published a decade ago, titled *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture* (1993, edited by Jane Costlow, Stephanie Sandler, and Judith Vowles). This issue of *SISC*, therefore, fills only a tiny portion of the huge critical vacuum.

The entries unapologetically ally themselves with the denatu-

ralization school of body analysis, reflecting the phenomena they examine. Irina Makoveeva's richly illustrated survey of the inseparable bond between national ideology and sporting ideals demonstrates how fluctuations in the latter inevitably corresponded to shifts in the Soviet Union's attentively forged self-image in the arena of international politics. During the Thaw, she contends, sports became demilitarized: the Stalinist body as a cog in the collective defense machine yielded to the individual athletic body as an envelope for the thinking professional's partly personal concerns. Inward rumination replaced outward projection, in a shift that typified the period.

Militarism, quite literally, is the focus of Olga Karpushina's essay, which compares Russian and American screen versions of two controversial late-twentieth-century wars, in Chechnya and Vietnam respectively. Representations of the enlisted body in these films radically differ from the familiar body-images generated by patriotic World War cinema, for the moral ambiguity of the (post?)modern conflicts inescapably revises earlier paradigms of the human form as a "heroic weapon." Cross-cultural parallels reveal the primacy of synchrony over diachrony in the two cultures' visual depiction of embattled psyches within bodies in battle.

Jonathan Stone's account of corporeality in Fedor Sologub's *Melkii bes* (The Petty Demon) firmly grounds the writer's body-philosophy in Vladimir Solov'ev's essay on love (1892-94). The latter's Orthodox conflation of ethics and aesthetics, Stone maintains, stems from the Biblical lapsarian myth that the Western (Latin/Roman) tradition subjected to a dogmatic codification equating carnality with shame. By contrast, Solov'ev posited the body's redemptive power, based on its divine origins, which in Sologub's novel acquires concrete substance in the unselfconscious androgynous beauty of Sasha Pyl'nikov.

Whereas Sologub attributes salvatory potential to the unpoluted body, director Sergei Ovcharov's much darker view of humanity in his silent film *Barabaniada* (The Drumiad 1993) suggests that the human body itself requires rescue or at least a prosthesis in order to function adequately in society. Seth Graham's compact essay contends that the body as sign does double duty in Ovcharov's unusual screen epic, simultaneously "narrating" the fate of the protagonist and the culture he confronts throughout his picaresque peregrinations.

The issue closes with Lori Johnston's feminist reading of Iza-bella Grinevskaia's little-known play "Ogon'ki" (First Storm) in its de-

but performance of 1895. Linking the action on stage with the status of both working actresses and women in general—but especially those within the audience—Johnston maintains that Grinevskaia's one-act drama overtly comments on the costume crisis of the era. More importantly, however, through the heroine's eloquent body "Ogon'ki" maps a route to female self-affirmation that offers a model for Grinevskaia's contemporaries.

Although this issue confines itself to the Russian body, it ranges over multiple genres: fiction, poetry, essay, film, sport, and theater. The illustrations accompanying the entries likewise draw on film stills, photographs, and paintings. In short, the diversity of bodies in the issue should offer something of interest to even the most jaded intellectual palate.

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The topic of *SISC*'s fourth issue is Bakhtin. The editors welcome submissions investigating any aspect of Bakhtin's thought and its role in verbal or visual culture.