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Elliot Evans, *The Body in French Queer Thought from Wittig to Preciado: Queer Permeability*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2020. xi + 176 pp. Notes and index. $144.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9780367142360; $54.99 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781032336121; $43.99 U.S. (ebook). ISBN 9780429030840.

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The body, in its actual materiality, is essential to queer theory. Extracting it from the theoretical articulations that queer theory posits diminishes the praxis and impact that such theory can have on the lived experiences of individuals in vulnerable communities, communities marginalized by discourses, institutions, and people that express control over the very body that queer thought must continue to centralize in order to save. Elliot Evans's *The Body in French Queer Thought from Wittig to Preciado: Queer Permeability* is a wonderful reminder of how vital and inextricably linked corporeal practice is to queer theory. Evans opens their text with a reminder that the body and queer theory are linked largely in part because of the social and governmental response to HIV/AIDS, from a "consciousness of the material vulnerability of certain bodies" more prone to contracting the virus and seroconversion (p. 1).

Evans's proposition is evident to me, someone entrenched in HIV/AIDS historical and cultural research for almost two decades, but also because queerness's practice has always been, for me, anchored to corporeal praxis. My body, your body, the social body--they either fall into acceptable expectations or not, in particular regarding sexual practice and gendered performance. But Evans suggests that while this *was* true, queer theory appears to have lost its footing in the 1990s, dropping its focus on the materiality of sex for other topics, "incapable of taking account of the material body" due to its foundations in poststructuralist French thought (p. 3). Their introduction thus summarizes the various obstacles that stood in the way of this return to the body, particularly among French queer theorists. They succinctly analyze the delayed arrival of queer theory in France (via translations) and how French republicanism impeded any focus on the rights or needs of minority groups--in this case, queer populations. An important point Evans makes, especially important for non-experts in French cultural history, is that queer thinking remains "embedded in activism" (p. 4) in France, rather than an isolated discipline only conceived of in universities à la U.S. and U.K.--a fact that continues to contribute to how queer theory is imagined, expressed, and practiced in France.

With their monograph, Evans makes a strong theoretical contribution, introducing readers to the concept of queer permeability that "seeks to take account of a reflexivity, a symbiosis between

material body and language" (p. 11). Their concept emphasizes the entangled relationship between the material body and language--the medium of expression Evans studies in the book. Queer permeability argues that theoretical writing is inseparable from political movements and conditions and can act materially on bodies. The argument is that there is a certain porosity to queer subjectivities where overlapping layers of "language, culture, and materiality" exist (p. 11). For Evans, the permeability is not about passing through unchanged, but rather absorbing and secreting--a "lively interaction between language and matter" (p. 12). For me, the suggestion is that there is no ontological substance that remains unchanged as we overlay language, culture, and materiality: these layers are not homogenous but are nonetheless inseparable.

The book sets out to elucidate the need for a return to the materiality of the body in four chapters, of which three deal with contemporary French queer thought via works by Paul B. Preciado, Monique Wittig, and a study of ORLAN's "art charnel." Chapter one goes back to the roots of philosophical thought on the body and mind drawing from Descartes. The chapter then considers Jean-Luc Nancy's engagement with Descartes's separation of body and mind in the former's *Ego Sum* (1979) and *l'Intrus* (2000). Chapter two situates itself as the anchor of the text and a prime example of the concept of queer permeability that Evans pioneers in the introduction. This chapter draws from Preciado's *Testo Junkie* (2008), an auto-theoretical text, or "body-essay" that follows Preciado's experience of hormone therapy via testosterone gel. Theoretical implications regarding inscription of gender, biopower, and the pharmaceutical industry aside (all of which are the main tenets of Preciado's text), Evans's second chapter demonstrates how "porous" queer thought and the body truly are by drawing on the fact that Preciado's hormone therapy was not about the gel passing through and remaining as it is, but rather how the body and the gel intermingle, or as Evans explains it, "symbiosis between texts and bodies" (p. 13). Evans analyzes various components of Preciado's text, including the fact that Preciado labels it "un essai corporel," which for them continues to blur the lines of theory and body, unifying the two.[1]

Chapter three is an additional analysis of the relation between writing and the material body specifically in Wittig's work. Evans advances their argument by moving away from Preciado's bodily acts as examples of materialist intervention towards Monique Wittig's textual materialism. Wittig is foundational to queer theory and influential in the American discourse, especially that of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990). We know Butler refers to Monique Wittig in the context of discussing the social construction of gender and the relationship between language, power, and identity. However, Butler critiques Wittig's views on gender, particularly her radical stance on the role of language in the construction of gender categories. Both Wittig and Butler are concerned with the relationship between language and power, but Wittig critiques the heterosexual matrix that sustains the concept of "woman" through linguistic and social mechanisms, while Butler argues that language is performative and is part of a broader system that reinforces gender norms and social hierarchies. Evans cogently counters Butler's interpretation of Wittig, arguing for "new material possibilities through literature" where Wittig "employs writing…to dismember the body through words, to open up space for new corporeal possibilities" (p. 78).

Chapter four is a fascinating inquiry into the multimedia art of ORLAN, and while ORLAN is not explicitly a queer artist, the biomedical and technical modifications she enacts on her body and in other forms are patently queer for Evans and therefore merit an examination because of how they question the "constructions and restrictions of gender and sex" (p. 108). The chapter analyzes numerous examples of ORLAN's artistry, but *Femme avec Tête* (1996), *Tête de la Méduse* (1978), and the Death's Head occupy a prominent position in the analysis. The chapter looks at ORLAN's performative art and new interpretations through various philosophical lens: Lacan's Real and Symbolic, Cartesianism, and universalism. Evans does a masterful job of showing how ORLAN's "art charnel" forces a confrontation between "meaning and the materiality of the body, testing the limits of both" (p. 149).

Evans's work here emphasizes the importance of material bodies in queer theory and the absolute obligation it has to represent them to a readership who wants a theory of praxis that impacts and affects the body. The book traces the development of a materialist approach to queer theory, using French thought as a case study--a novel approach given the torturous relationship the French had and have with gender and queer theory--an approach that emphasizes the importance of the body, particularity, and political engagement in queer theory. It is a compelling read for any queer theorist of the French-speaking world, particularly those with a focus on the Hexagon. I appreciate the stress Evans places on the need to return to material corporeality--something, perhaps, they insinuate U.S. queer theory of the 1990s and early 2000s has gotten away from. The text is thought-provoking in that it has made me question if essential texts of queer futurity, ontology, and subjectivity à la Lee Edelman (whom Evans addresses in their conclusion), José Esteban Muñoz, and Sara Ahmed, among others, really do stray from the body. For me, existence predicates a certain materiality in a society--an existence that is regulated and experienced by normative institutions. Evans's project is well structured and a needed reminder not to make theory too abstract, but always link it to a corporeal praxis because queer theory was born out of a material reality--that of sex and later disease with HIV/AIDS.

Notes

[1] Paul B. Preciado, *Testo Junkie: Sexe, drogue et biopolitique* (Paris: Grasset, 2008), p. 11.

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