

I, They, Body, Space

Maike Hemmers

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Maike Hemmers's image essay is part of the *Open!* COOP Academy research theme *Between and Beyond* [www.onlineopen.org/between-and-beyond]. In order to understand the boundaries between bodies as animate and inanimate beings, she attempts to question the notion of a body as a fixed condition. 'I, They, Body, Space' is me and them as bodies in space. What does a stone desire, when it's falling? What does a dead rat want to talk about, when it places itself next to a rubber glove? And what is an I: Is it the body that reflects on itself or is it the body that disconnects?



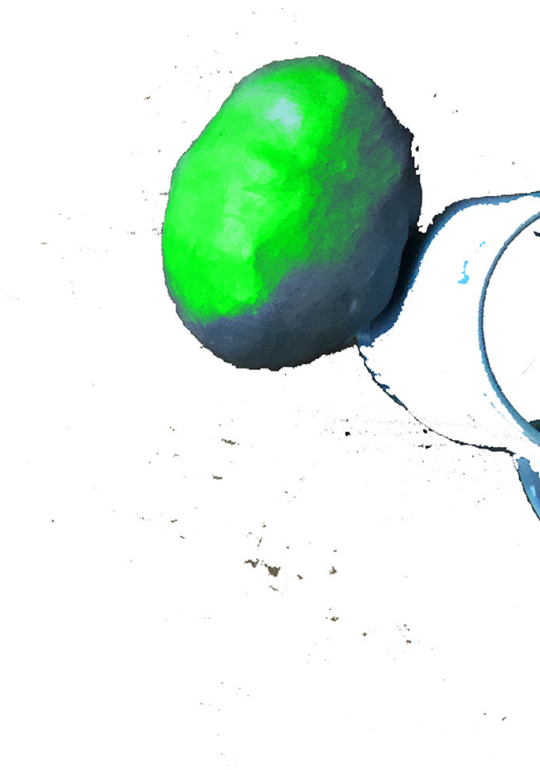
They live close by the water. On sunny days they walk toward the canal. The water fascinates them, it is different every time, tamed in a rectangle of stones. Scattered around the water's edge there are always some things to be found. They usually pick something up to hold in their hands. They don't look for something particular. They pick up anything off the ground that speaks to them. Anything isn't looking for something, but waiting and feeling. If they would be aware of the something, they could pick it up. Holding it in on their flat palms they take a good look at it to make sure their eyes comprehend what they are seeing. When they clasp their hands together, they feel its presence with a slight pain. The thing is squeezed so the hands themselves can understand it as well. When the hands open, the eyes see the red lines of its outline inside their hands. Sometimes one wants to

squeeze hardest the things most loved. They clasp their hands again until warmth is created between them and the thing. They feel the warm moisture around it. They press their hands together a little more to feel the strength in their hand surrounding the thing. The soft flesh of their body conforms around the shell of the thing. When they hold it for a few minutes longer it turns into a part of themselves. The soft cover of their hand and the hard centre become one. To feel pleasure they open themselves up to the vibrancy of the material. They stay like this for a while, connected, looking absently into the water. Then they open their hands. A slight shock appears at the sudden disruption of the connection. They put it on the ground, approximately where it lay before. Again, placed with all the rest, it merges into a union of bodies on the ground.

*I exists to take care of Them. They choose I.
I knows where the power lies,
It is not with I.*

*Oh, the talking and
caressing and
organizing and
remembering and
pleasing and
cleaning and
feeding and
playing and
feeling and
stroking and
maintaining and
holding, that is needed to please Them.*

*I doesn't mind as long as
I will never be alone again.*



1 likes to stay on the ground, preferably close to fire. To soothe it in times of turbulence you can light a match. Its favourite colour is purple. The smell of slightly burnt pizza pleases it. 2 is funny and prefers to be in the middle of everything. It observes a scene for a while, then, places itself in the centre. If no one laughs at its jokes for longer than half an hour it goes off to sulk in the margins. It prefers linen over cotton. 3 is a medium, but willing to stay with the smalls. It is not very noticeable but noticeably important for the group. It is best to leave it be, it can take care of itself best when you don't hassle it too much. Give it soft licorice candy to make it happy. 4 is wild and unpredictable, it tends to make a mess. It is charming, though be careful not to get trapped in its honey trap. If 4 and 2 are together for too long they might start an uproar in the room. 4 secretly adores 1. 5 is restless, but hides it. It likes to be alone, but then feels lonely too quickly, so it sticks around. It is a contradiction and it knows it. Don't pay too much attention to it or it will cry. Stroke its chin to give it comfort. 6 is almost never seen. Most of the time it sleeps under the cushions, it can easily be forgotten. Don't wake it or it will be grumpy and hide under the next available blanket. 7 is the biggest and the oldest, though it would rather not admit it. It stays clean by itself but unfortunately doesn't bring its good example to the attention of the others.



*An I is a body in a space. A body is an I in a space.
A space is a body in an I.
An I is a space in a body. A space is an I in a body.
A body is a space in an I.*



I sweeps out its body with a brush every morning. With a downward-facing movement starting with the head, I brushes out everything the body contains in order for it to be filled with the coming day. This practice ensures a clean and organized condition inside the body. The empty shell of a body allows events to enter. I sits still for a while to observe the emptiness inside. Then I goes about the day, works, or on days off doesn't, walks and cycles, has lunch and dinner, is silent or talks. In the evening I squats on the ground to collect everything that had been swept out of the body in the morning. I puts everything

back inside where it had been before. The body needs to be filled to sleep. I goes to bed. Blinking eyes, thin blanket over the body, I falls asleep with a body filled with prospects, events, blood and organs.



After I am awake for two hours I take a knife to cut my heart out of my chest. The reverberation of a presence in its bloody chambers is keeping me from sleeping. After I localized the heart I cut it out in one smooth motion. I put the heart on my bed. Next is the stomach, filled with inconsistency and a downward-pulling feeling. The tissues are cut through easily. I put it next to the heart. Then I cut out the lungs. They are neatly placed next to the heart and stomach. I take the knife again to cut out the piece of skin with the itching mole. It has a bit of a rough pattern. I couldn't see the spot very well. I put it with the rest, glad that the body parts cannot bother me anymore. I lie down next to them and turn around to face the wall. I close the eyes, faintly hearing the heart pound on the sheets.

I am the space I am in. I am in a space, so I am?

Am I the environment I live in?

Where does my body end and the walls begin?

Is space where my body is?

Is a space my body when I am in?

When my body is outside the space where am I then?

Is my body and the space separated when I am not in?

Is my body the space only when I am in?

Am I my body because the body is a space?

Am I the space because the space is a body?

Is my body my space?

Am I the space?

Is the body I?

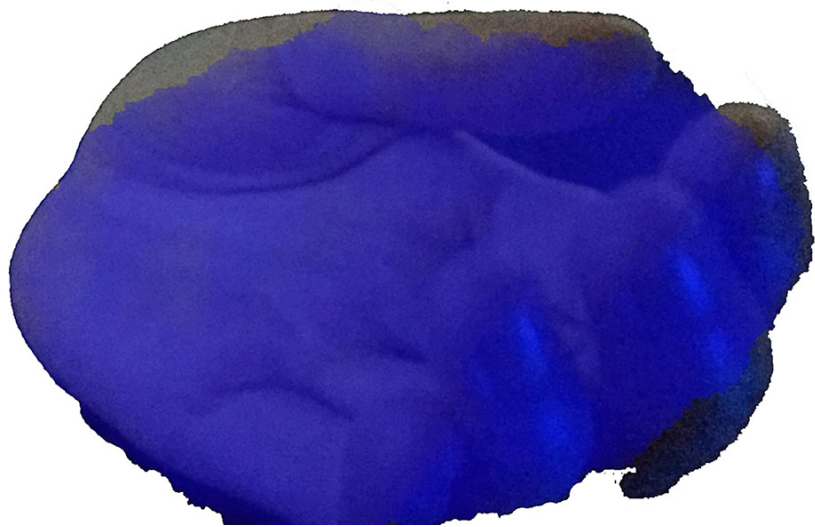
Am I the space? Is the body I?



The voice tells me to *- please - leave - a - mes - sage*. It confuses me, because the voice sounds so ignorant of my breathing. The distanced body of solitary words stops me from saying what is expected. I hang up and call again. I listen carefully to the voice and its apparent desire to hear my thoughts. I hang up again and call again. I mimic the voice *- I - can - not*. I hang up again and call again, held captive by the need to make a call and the simultaneous resistance to answer anything spoken as syllables. *Please - leave - a - mes - sage*. I wait until the voice makes a sound that indicates it is time for me to speak. And hang up again. I call again and this time another voice asks *Hello?* And I stop breathing and hang up again.

vibrrration
vibrrrrrrration
vvvvviibrrrrrrrationn
vvvvviibrrrrrrratioonnnnnn

hello
hello
touch
say, touch
touch
touched



Maike Hemmers is a German artist, living and working in Rotterdam. Her current research includes the conception of ordinary and imagined spaces, the boundaries between bodies and the notion of 'nothing.'

Crosslinks

Between and Beyond: www.onlineopen.org/between-and-beyond

Tags

Aesthetics, Critical Theory

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