

The Body Electric

"Embodiment!" — Virginia Magnat
"I sing the Body electric" — Walt Whitman
"Your body is a wonderland" — John Mayer

"D our bodies sing?" I ask the children at dinner, and they giggle.

"The body is wise," says the yogi. She urges me to stretch and breathe. But I've just finished dinner. My body will sing in the parking lot after yoga.

"The body is wise," says the drama professor. "Know it. Feel your body. Feel the emotion in your pores."

I look at the window and see my reflection. The body is strange. The body is a stranger.

I awake. The soft paws of an old cat standing upon my head. Hear the purring.

My body is sore. The tenseness radiates from the back of the neck upward. I can take a few pills, swallow coffee and face the day, but something makes me want to stop and feel the pain, embrace the pain, wrestle it to the ground, understand its source.

Or do I?

"It must be stress," she whispers, pushing her thumbs into the base of my skull.

I feel nothing. The furnace blows. My wife's hair smells like vanilla.

"Ow," I say.

My body is a stranger. It has its own intelligence, a peculiar intelligence, something beyond me, something beyond what I know.

"Sing to me. Sing the body electric."

For some, the western separation between mind and body is a conceptual error, the separation a leftover from the soul-body split illustrative of Plato, Descartes and myth.

For many, the mind is not something separate from the body.

Feel — don't think, feel the body's own consciousness. Feel the body's song. Feel the stress your body absorbs.

She whispers, "Feel the water on the moon."

"Hey, stop that," I say, laughing.

We have a house rule: no tickling allowed. Tickling is dangerous. Tickling is craziness, a kind of abuse in itself.

"Hey," she whispers, "be more conscious, more aware."

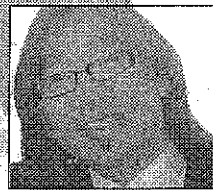
But she does not speak in words.

"More aware of what?" I ask.

I want to know. She comes to me in the mornings, touching the back of my neck. I can feel the curve of her shape. I can feel her breath upon my shoulders.

"Who are you?" she asks, and the question makes me shiver.

When she holds me in her arms, I want to let go, as if I am falling into fast waters, the



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river of a woman's love. Out of control — I want to be. Lost in the embrace of full embodiment — when the mind forgets and the body remembers: this is who I am.

More than rising thoughts. This is the skin and body of Stan Chung, whom I love.

Does your body love you? What an I? the mind says, but the body knows the answer.

The body's consciousness says that love is more than a feeling, more than willful commitment, just as nourishment is more than digestion, just as you can see things that cannot be seen.

"Is the body dirty? Is the body riddled with secrets? Is the body a wonderland?"

"Yes," she says to me gently, "especially when it is loved properly."

The granular light of 7 a.m. She smiles good morning and locks the door. It is Sunday morning again. Another week. The earth has spun seven times. What does the body say beyond its own fatigue, soreness and numbness?

"I'm tired," the body says. "Take my half-heartedness away."

The imagination wanders.

Up the road, it is Williams Lake and I'm 10 years old. I'm riding my green mustang bike, the wind across my face, my feet in a singular whirl. I am all body. I am all time. I am now and forever.

What is it like when nature touches you? What is her language? What does she say?

You are young and old at the same time. You feel more than friction upon your skin. You feel the heat of someone's touch, the texture of time's caress. You feel a child's lips upon your cheek, your mother's hand pulling you up the steps into the hot air of a Vancouver bus. How does your body feel when it remembers? What does it feel? What does it feel under the Okanagan sky?

My body says you're an old man. Another birthday has passed. My body says hang on, hang on tight, or we'll be forced to let go. All systems — let go. But I want to let go, I think, and my body thinks — spasm. My body thinks

— collapse. My body thinks — tears.

Tears? What tears?

Give the body a moment to remember the sadness.

The sadness exists — not just because of hurts and mistakes that embody your own history — but the sadness of your beautiful wife whose hair smells of vanilla and grass, your mother, Sook Ja, whose hair smells of cinnamon and suede, your grandmother, Bong Choon, whose hair smells of dandelion and sesame, and all the faces and scents of the women before and after her.

Did anyone touch my grandmother? Inhale her sesame hair? Did she know love?

She took care of us in Seoul, when our parents went to Canada. She told us stories at night about robbers and tigers. She never held me. She never kissed me or caressed me. She was pregnant and abandoned at 16.

How was her feudal lifestyle embodied in my father and then passed to me, to my own hands, to the way you caress your children, to the way they will caress theirs? Who will be there to tame the fistfuls of grasses marking your grave?

You didn't know you carried the sadness of generations in your bones. You didn't know. You understand now, the body says. The invisible limp, the bowed-back, the curved leg — you carry the generations of farmers, abalone divers and spies.

No wonder the body sings electric — rocketing back and forth through generational time where sadness and joy jump like returning salmon. Open your eyes and see the forgotten scars, bent smiles, lost teeth, broken limbs, gnarled toes, double-sized hearts.

Your family is a body, a beautiful, tragic and forgotten body.

The blood of generations cleanses and boils and remembers what you have forgotten: you stand like the grandfather you never met. Informer. Revolutionary. Peasant.

Pay attention to body, the body of your life.

Be aware of the sound of teeth grinding at night. Heed the muscular request to find joy in movement. Sleep well. Eat well. Drink water passionately. Give compassionately. Love well — with much more than everything you have.

At night, your body chases you in a dream. Your body smiles. If she catches you, she may tickle you, make you laugh until you cry, and if you're not paying attention, she just may squeeze the life out of you. Are you ready for your body to love you?

Sing, body sing.

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