

Physical Cultural Studies and Embodied Research Acts

Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies
11(6) 523–534
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DOI: 10.1177/1532708611426107
http://csc.sagepub.com


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Abstract

This article critically examines the emerging field of physical cultural studies, especially its contributions to our understandings of “the body” in and through its ongoing relationship with the research act. That is, a focus on the confluence of the embodied self and the [auto-]ethnographic self as it relates to the conduct of inquiry. It also addresses the politics of the body within a particular neoliberal condition, and the way the body and its health and well-being is leveraged as a pedagogical apparatus of neoliberalism. It concludes by arguing that we need to privilege bodily copresence within the theory, method, and practice of physical cultural studies.

Keywords

physical cultural studies, reflexivity, embodiment, politics of research

Performance sometimes resists, exceeds, and overwhelms
the constraints and strictures of writing.

—Dwight Conquergood, 1991, p. 193

Proem

Who is claiming the body?
Who claims how we should know the body, its uses,
and its effects?
Whose interests intercede upon our everyday lives, and
the everyday uses of our own individual bodies?

* * *

We start with a simple confession: We’re not very good ethnographers. At least, not in the classical sense.¹ We have come to realize that in spite of the comprehensive training in qualitative inquiry we received during our graduate studies—and despite our ongoing authorial engagements with the topic (see Giardina, 2009; Newman, 2007)—we don’t necessarily *do* ethnography very well. At times, we’re timid; at others, invasive. We don’t ask the right “data generating” questions and we tend to get lost in social space, often missing key cultural moments as we meander about the banal. When we’re in the so-called “field,” we spend as much time grappling with our placeness and agonizing over our social location as we (in various degrees) do interviews, scribble notes, collect “artifacts” of material culture, or ruminate about our location to the social world around us.

Even in writing up this proem, we can’t help but cringe as we reflect on the many uncomfortable episodes we have created during our various research endeavors. But the real kicker is this: We’re not that good as *critical ethnographers* either. Now, you may think we’re joking or just deploying self-deprecating fodder for disarming effect (and perhaps we are . . .), but there is truth in humor.

When we write about what we’ve done, or with whom we’ve seen or spoken, it gets worse. We each struggle to create rich, vivid texts that morally, ethically, and faithfully interpret the complexities and pluralities we have encountered (as, we imagine, is the case with many others, including those featured in this Special Issue). At times more prosaic than poetic, our writing often hides behind the anthropologist’s argot—stringing together block quotes from interviews, layering disjointed musings into performative prose, making detours through theory, or pooling excerpts from media texts in ways that may quite rightly reveal abstract bio-political entanglements but tell us very little about the *everyday struggles* and *flesh politics* of the individuals we are representing (see, for example, Giardina & Newman, 2011b).

Part of the problem, we reckon, stems from the type of research we do, whether solely (see Giardina, 2005, 2009;

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Newman, 2007, 2010) or jointly (see Newman & Giardina, 2008, 2011). In simple terms, we study social bodies and physical cultures often situated (by self or other) at the intersecting vectors of power, knowledge, and identity, mingling about those subject positionalities upon which power is either challenged or reaffirmed (in both real and imaginary ways) through bodily performance and praxis. That is, we purposefully locate and negotiate our researching bodies among bodies in/of movement, seeking out those locales where the cultural dynamics of race, gender, social class, ability, sexuality, nationalism, and so on intersect in productive ways. And as we have each learned, such a politically loaded project—bound as it is to our own politics, our own biases, our own theoretical and methodological dispositions—can be a very complicated enterprise (see Madison, 2005).

What we've come to realize is something Michel Foucault made quite clear more than four decades ago: Architectures of subjectivity work across multiple axes—and things are never quite as simple as oppressor/oppressed (or any other such dichotomies). Of course, we understand that this key distinction makes the work of an [auto-]ethnographer who is seeking out power, as [re]produced through various cultural physicalities, almost impossible.² That said, however, we believe this type of work is still worth doing but that we need to carefully conceive how we approach the study of power and, more importantly, how we position our bodies and our (researching) self(s) in relation to its social production: It is imperative for those working in and around bodies to engage with the complex dialectical relationships of the embodied self and the [auto-]ethnographic self, reflexively interrogating, as Wanda Pillow (2003) asks, where the research/author begins and ends (if at all) in relation to the research and research participants (p. 182).

While our previous work (Giardina & Newman, 2011a, 2011c) has laid bare the performative imperatives and bodily articulations of the wide-ranging dynamics of *physical cultural studies* (detailed briefly below), our aim within the pages of this Special Issue is to highlight the emerging work in the field that, collectively and in isolation, contributes to our understanding of “the body”—in and through its ongoing relationship to the research act.³ In other words, a focus on the confluence of the embodied self and the [auto-]ethnographic self as it relates to the conduct of inquiry.⁴

Physical Culture and Embodied Research Act/s

There has been a recent turn within the field of physical cultural studies toward engagement with “the body” beyond mere topical orientation and discursive or poststructuralist longing.⁵ Two recent interventions in particular (see Giardina & Newman, 2011a, 2011c), in conversation with a growing chorus of agreement and/or debate (see, for example, Andrews & Silk, 2011; Atkinson, 2011; Carrington, 2008; Friedman &

van Ingen, 2011; Rich, 2011; Silk & Andrews, 2011; Thorpe, Barbour, & Bruce, 2011), have moved to position the research act/s of embodied [auto-]ethnography as one of the primary striations of this field.

To wit, we contend that “any discussion concerning the imperatives of, and for, physical cultural studies starts (and perhaps ends) along the articulatory axes of *politics* and *practice*; and, more specifically, the *body*—of researcher and researched alike⁶—as locus of politics and praxis” (Giardina & Newman, 2011c, p. 37). As such, we suggest that we would do well to begin thinking about the research *act* of [physical] cultural studies as necessarily being “an embodied activity” (Coffey, 1999, p. 59). To ignore such an understanding, posits Kristy Nabhan-Warren (2011), “is to occlude lived experience and how our bodies are epistemological sites that allow us privileged access to our interlocutor’s worlds” (p. 378). Importantly, she continues, “methodological reflexivity through embodied ethnography should not be something that is an afterthought; *it should be the very basis by which fieldwork is done*” (p. 384, emphasis added).⁷

The interpretive processes brought to life by such inquiry, William L. Rodman (1993) reminds us, is always already a dialogic one:

. . . the people we study study us, even in moments when we do not seek to study. We are not just observers observed; we are interpreters interpreted. To figure out what the devil they think they are up to requires us to try to figure out what they think we are up to—our motivation, purposes, and (sometimes) the moral message we bring with us. This is another side to reflexivity, one crucial to understanding the dialogics of encounters in field research, and one that anthropologists have only begun to explore. (p. 189)

In this manner, research is thus viewed as “an interactive process shaped by one’s personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity *and* those of the people in the setting” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 5, emphasis added).

But perhaps there is more to it. Pat Thomson and Thomas Gunter (2011) have recently argued that research identities are “not only dialogic . . . but perhaps even more fluid than that” (p. 26), what Zygmunt Bauman might refer to as the contingent “liquidity of identity.” Under this stance, remaining critically [self-]reflexive about the “way of engaging with questions and issues by thinking about personal beliefs, judgments, perceptions, and multiple subject positions in a self-conscious critical manner and interrogating these into the research process” becomes all the more important (Bain & Nash, 2006, p. 100). Or put more simply, as Amanda Coffey (1999) writes in *The Ethnographic Self*, we must acknowledge the critical extent to which “our body and the bodies of others are central to the practical accomplishments

of fieldwork” (p. 59) *while at the same time* complicating our own relationships—as scholar, ethnographer, writer, human actor, etc.—to any such site of critical inquiry.

We have likewise argued (see Giardina & Newman, 2011c) that in order to

engender significant heuristic pedagogies of the subjugated and transformative body, we need to wield theories, strategies, and epistemologies that account for the minutiae, the variations, and the complex formations of physical culture (*especially those impacting our own bodies with the research act*). (p. 185, emphasis in original)

Which is to say, our personal politics influence not only our [auto-]ethnographic positionings but also the ways in which we perform our [auto-]ethnographic selves once in position.⁸ As Tara Woodyer (2008) maintains, we need to remain cognizant of “the contingent nature of the ethnographic encounter, placing the ethnographer within a web of intersubjective relations . . . [in which] [c]ulture is no longer conceived as an assemblage of texts to be interpreted, but is understood as performed” (p. 352).

Related to the scope of this Special Issue, the discontinuities rendered during our various encounters, for lack of a better term, encourage us to consider how we have come to conceive of the *performance* of the research act itself. Judith Hamera (2006) quite rightly notes that

performance links experience, theory, and the work of close critique in ways that make precise analytical claims about cultural production and consumption, and expose how both culture and our claims are themselves constructed things, products of hearts and souls, minds and hands. (p. 241; also quoted in Spry, 2011, p. 508)

Indeed, the field presents a rich tapestry of invigorating studies, from the poetic to the somatic, from the spoken to the melodious. And yet, with few exceptions, we (that is, scholars of/in [physical] cultural studies, including ourselves) too often tend to gloss over how we come to position, *and be positioned by*, things like pain, suffering, subjectivity, love, power, and so on. Where do we, then, as performative creatures, sit in the social worlds from which we create these texts?⁹ How does the researcher create her subjective position within and against the rhythms of determinacy? How does she write about it? How does she come to know her experiences as they relate to those participants she stands alongside? How are the polysemic gaps between the authorial body and bodily texts negotiated by the research? By the researcher? By the researched? How do we go about re/

presenting this collision of politics and practices? And once we’ve made sense of, or at least identified, these tensions and contradictions, how can we move forward?¹⁰

Tami Spry (2011), for one, has persuasively argued that we must “write from within the entanglements of co-presence, from the rapture of communion, from the un/comfortable risk and intimacy of dialogue, from the vulnerable and liminal inbetweenness of self/other/context” (p. 507). In a similar vein, and building from Laurel Richardson’s (2000) view of writing as a method of inquiry, Ronald J. Pelias (2011) suggests that, in and through writing, the researcher asserts a self, insisting that she *matters* (p. 659). In his article titled “Writing Into Position,” Pelias (2011) elaborates on both reflexive and embodied writing strategies of inquiry. In the first instance, “Researchers who see themselves as implicated write about their complicity in the problem they are trying to address . . . [as they] . . . position themselves as contributing to the predicament” (p. 663). In the second, “they write into the *mind/body split* as a corrective to cognitive renderings, calling upon the *sensuous* body, and tap into *bodily experiences*” (Pelias, 2011, p. 663, emphases in original). Pelias (2007) likewise notes that the “interpellated presence” of calling the body into being “takes four primary, and at times, combined, forms”: troubling presence, affective presence, authentic presence, and political presence (pp. 185–186). Taken together, he argues, these four presences

articulate the body as a sensuous, originating center that situates speech in the felt, muscular, and somatic; as an identity market, perhaps estranged, that requires personal and cultural negotiation; and as an authentic and truthful representation of self that can be deployed on behalf of oneself and others. (p. 186)

In this Special Issue, our collected authors reside in the liminal spaces between and among these camps, reconciled by Spry’s (2011) invocation that “it is, of course, *through language*, that we ‘body forth’ in interpreting and articulating what the body ‘knows’” (p. 507, emphasis added).¹¹

By way of example, consider the work of Jason Laurendeau (in press). In his autoethnographic accounting of relational risk in the sport of BASE jumping,¹² Laurendeau writes into a space of fractured, polyvocal uncertainty as he recounts, via dialogue and internal monologue, the emotions, contradictions, dangers, and problematics associated with becoming—and then *un-becoming*—an active participant in the BASE community. As he explains his initial attachment to his site of inquiry,

Once I jumped, I couldn’t stop thinking about doing it again, about learning to do it on my own. I genuinely love the feeling of being scared by something,

facing that fear, and jumping into it. There's a kind of confidence that comes from that, one that translates into other areas of my life (Lyng, 1990). There's more though. I'd be lying if I said I don't get off on other people telling me I'm crazy for the stuff I do. (p. 11)

Moreover, sharing side notes and memos to himself with the reader so as to "illustrate the messiness of the research enterprise, and the development of [his] ideas and perspectives throughout this process" (p. 3), Laurendeau announces his politics *in advance*, reassuring the reader, as Laura L. Ellingson (1998) would put it, that his "findings are thoroughly contaminated"—a contamination that "results in a rich, complex understanding" of the ground upon which he resides as both embodied research participant and autoethnographer (p. 183).¹³ In so doing, notes Norman K. Denzin (1997), research such as this "ceaselessly interrogates the realities it invokes while folding the teller's story into a multivocal history that is written" (p. 225).¹⁴

In a similar vein, Katie Flanagan's (2011) critical ethnography of fitness centers and technologies of material culture as embodied in the so-called "skort" (or "running skirt") situates her in the role of active fitness enthusiast. Donning a fashionable skort for a number of fitness classes at a local gym, Flanagan both uses her body as a performative instrument through which to gather empirical material while at the same time dialoguing about, around, through, and with the peculiarity of wearing such attire in the first place:

I walk into the studio alongside working women clothed in business attire—suits, dresses, and a-line skirts. Some of the women have children in tow and each carries a gym bag containing workout attire—they are simultaneously mothers, employees, exercisers, and so on. Suddenly, my life as a single, childless female seems a lot less complex . . . Twenty other women fill the group exercise room for a 5:30 p.m. body toning class. The students are dressed in apparel ranging from spandex to golf shirts and even tanks with designer labels; I'm dressed in a navy blue skort about two inches above the knee, the only one dressed that way. [*The model in the advertisement looked carefree, strong, and confident. I feel awkward, uncomfortable, and out of place.*] As I perform the instructor's commands, I feel a bit ridiculous doing *pliés* with a twenty-pound barbell across my shoulders. This graceful ballet-like move seems contradictory to the muscle-building objective of the class—and my skort *accentuates* this contradiction. I continue to squat, press, lunge; the skort is not *physically* constricting, yet is mentally distracting as

I waiver between feeling "girly" in my skirt and powerful and strong lifting weights . . . Dressed in an athletic skort, I yearned for a simple pair of shorts. (pp. 13-14).

Complicating matters for Flanagan is her previous background as a fitness instructor and elite athlete for more than a decade, which is rendered invisible by the materiality of her fashion choice. As she informs the reader, "The instructor assumed I was a novice – she basically told me as much –based solely on my apparel, and treated me as such . . . How many other women has this so-called empowering item infantilized or disempowered?" (p. 30). In these instances, her research body quite clearly "cannot be understood as fixed or stable; rather it needs to be rendered explicitly visible as a contested site of knowledge production" (Bain & Nash, 2006, p. 99). In many ways, then, and returning to Woodyer (2008), the experiences Flanagan has are not simply "there for the taking, but [are] provisional, open to potential, coming into being through us, through our enactment of the world . . . [in] the relation between the material and the discursive" (pp. 354, 358), between her bodily comportment and her [auto-]ethnographic imagination.

"[F]ar from trying to keep the areas of theory development, hypothesis construction, data collection, and analysis (the reporting of this process) artificially separate," acknowledges Ben Carrington (2008), scholars such as Laurendeau and Flanagan "instead explore how all these moments, as social practices, are interrelated and (re)define one another" (p. 425). Theirs are the kind of "messy texts" to which Denzin (1997) refers, ones that "are aware of their own narrative apparatuses, that are sensitive to how reality is socially constructed, and that understand that writing is a way of 'framing' reality" (p. 224). They are always, he continues, "many sited, intertextual, always open ended, and resistant to theoretical realism, but always committed to cultural criticism" (Denzin, 1997, p. 224).

The Politics of the Body¹⁵

One question we have yet to directly address is *why* the focus on [em]bodied research is of such importance in the historical present. Beyond the somewhat broad rejoinders to this question (e.g., the body in relation to overconsumption and overproduction; being used as an accomplice to the homogenizing strategies of global popular culture; being confined to heteronormative "family values" discourses; being deployed as both immanent threat and as under threat; etc.), one constant seemingly holds true: that of a neoliberal disposition governing the spaces in which we live and work—the spaces our bodies inhabit.¹⁶

At the intersection of “science,” pedagogy, and political economy, what those of us who study and work in and around physical culture face is a particular *body-polity* configuration, if you will, that has created a number of phenomena contextually specific to its time: the mass individualization of the body (and its well-being); an ancillary responsabilization *sans* history; an overpublicized obesity “epidemic”; extended mass poverty and genocide across the globe; new manifestations of social injustice (layered on to many of the old orders); and new forms of social control over the body. Behind these trends, we find a surfeit of intermediaries, ideologues, and political figures working tirelessly to bend the mediated and physical body around their interests: Think tank intellectuals, university research center directors, religious fundamentalists, economists, lobbyists, corporate elites, politicians, militarists, and a wide range of other constituents mobilize political influence and capital in efforts to [attempt to] influence the way we think about living, moving, producing, and consuming fleshed and hyper-real potentialities of the human body. In this way, the body, and how we use it and think about its uses, is contested and contestable—constantly negotiating the interests of the self and of others, entangled in a web of politics and power relationships.

Over time, it has become increasingly clear that *the body* sits at the locus of this neoliberal revolution. Jason Read (2009), explains:

Neoliberalism operates on interests, desires, and aspirations rather than through rights and obligations; it does not directly mark the body, as sovereign power, or even curtail actions, as disciplinary power; rather, it acts on the conditions of actions. Thus, neoliberal governmentality follows a general trajectory of intensification. This trajectory follows a fundamental paradox; as power becomes less restrictive, less corporeal, it also becomes more intense, saturating the field of actions, and possible actions. (p. 29)¹⁷

A survey of the contemporary mediascape teaches us *which* bodies matter; recent headlines are instructive: While the life of an unborn child in the United States seems to dominate public debates, many suffering young bodies in northern Japan, Syria, Somalia, or Egypt are made invisible—or in Henry Giroux’s (2006) term *disposable*—and hence without value, by our major media streams; and those children of war, particularly those wars that directly serve the nation’s geopolitical interests, barely exist in our everyday deliberations. In this paradigm, obese bodies are to be avoided or held accountable, drug-using bodies are to be criminalized, working-class bodies in West Virginia mines or Iraqi oil fields are expendable, feminine bodies are to be sexualized, queer bodies are to be reminded of their queerness, and so on. In other words, the neoliberal condition presents our society not just a

change in policy but a change in our very *ontology* (about the body, in this case).

When the body and its health and well-being is leveraged as a *pedagogical* apparatus of neoliberalism, every individual is considered to be “equally unequal,” as Foucault put it. Exploitation, domination, and every other form of social inequality is rendered invisible as *social* phenomena to the extent that each individual’s social condition is judged as nothing other than the effect of his or her own choices and investments. As Wendy Brown (2003) has pointed out, the corporeal body of this *homo economicus* is constructed—not as a citizen who obeys rules, pursues common goods, and addresses problems it shares with others – but as a rational and calculating entrepreneur who is not only capable of but also responsible for caring for him- or herself. This effect, Brown continues, has the effect of “depoliticizing social and economic powers” as well as reducing “political citizenship to an unprecedented degree of passivity and political complacency,” all of which turns on the body.

Is it enough, then, as many self-identified adherents to (physical) cultural studies portend, that the study of the body should continue to reside at the level of the discursive, as artifacts of culture? Put differently, is it enough to say that LeBron James’s celebrity iconicity embodies a nation’s racial tensions, or that the Olympics are a media-sport mega event *par excellence*, or that David Beckham is illustrative of contemporary metrosexuality, or that the body mass index (BMI) offers but a crude instrument of body disciplinary simulacrum?¹⁸

Perhaps. *But perhaps not*. And therein lies the problem with the *culture* in (physical) cultural studies. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt writes,

Since the rise of society, since the admission of household and housekeeping activities to the public realm, an irresistible tendency to grow, to devour the older realms of the political and private as well as the more recently established sphere of intimacy, has been one of the outstanding characteristics of the new realm. This constant growth, whose no less constant acceleration we can observe over the last three centuries, derives its strength from the fact that through society it is the life process itself which in one form or another has been channeled into the public realm. (p. 45)

For those working within an interpretive sensibility, this quote might lead us to argue that the “life process,” and the portents of embodiment generated therein, are made public in and through the realm of the social—and thereby the body is a meaningful and productive site of culture within society. But too often our analyses *end* somewhere near the point where we have interpreted, often through sharp prose, the [teleo]logics of the body’s cultural politics.

Indulge us for a moment as we revisit the work of Raymond Williams, and particularly his foundational definition of “culture” from his important text, *Keywords*. As those in cultural studies are surely aware, Williams argues that “culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language.” Through linguistic and etymological rancor, Williams leads us to the oft-cited explanation of culture as “a set of practices/system of meaning through which we learn the values, ideas, and beliefs (the ideologies) of the society in which we live.” Yet there is *another* distinction that Williams makes later in his entry for the term *culture*. He writes, “It is especially interesting that in archaeology and in *cultural anthropology* the reference to culture or a culture is primarily to *material* production, while in history and *cultural studies* the reference is primarily to *signifying* or *symbolic* systems” (p. 91).

It is this distinction, which Williams accurately surmises constitutes the epistemological basis upon which much cultural studies work—and subsequently *physical* cultural studies work—that has been underpinned. But do we (and here we are speaking as a field) follow those lines of meaning, of production, and of power to their ends?

Generally speaking, we do not.

Rather, and too often, we make the case for how and why these various cultural formations exist and tend to be quite satisfied—if not self-congratulatory—in naming and mapping those lines that often get overlooked by our colleagues in fields ranging from sociology to human genetics.¹⁹ Forging another path, we need to take into account the personal journeys, and related technologies of the self, that frame each cultural encounter. In short, we need a *copresent* study of the cultural body.

With the above overview in mind, we now turn to a description of each of the articles contained in this Special Issue, which represent such diverse topics as work conducted in historical archives; on embodied mascots; at the intersection of race, class, and geography; in the classroom environment; with young women; and on violence and poverty. We then offer a brief conclusion, or way forward, for those situated within the physical cultural studies endeavor.

The Articles

The Special Issue begins with Jennifer Guiliano’s article (“Chasing Objectivity: Critical Reflections on History, Identity, and the Public Performance of Indian Mascots”), which offers a contemplative self-reflection on the politics of historical work, and namely on her experience as a critical historian researching the origins of Native American sports mascots. In her piece, Guiliano guides us through the historian’s research act—beyond the archives and into the performative spaces where identity, subjectivity, and power converge onto and through moments of historical inquiry. In locating her own history with Native American mascots,

she reveals the complicated processes that weigh on the post-Reconstructionist historian’s intellectual praxis, whereby her commitment to social justice and critical historical inquiry created a series of fractures. Guiliano writes about how, as she delved deeper into her research, she became increasingly alienated from her sport-passionate family, her students, and the sporting communities to which she once belonged. Discussing her interpretive journeys to Stanford University, Florida State University, the University of North Dakota, and her home institution, the University of Illinois, she contemplates,

Was this my community any longer? And, if it was, did I completely understand what I was trying to be part of? Was this modern-day theatre based on stereotypes of race and colonization, or was it an educationally based “community” at its most fractured?

She concludes with a series of self-reflexive ripostes about how her own embodied identity politics created relationships of power in the archives, at the dinner table, at the lectern, and in the grandstands and how, despite objectivist historians perseverance, her experience demonstrates that not only is history always already subjective but also are the practices of the practicing, embodied, subjectified historian.

Topically similar but methodologically distinct from that of Guiliano’s approach, Mary Weems’s contribution follows, presenting us with a poetic interrogation of the embodied mascot phenomenon. Titled “Sun Dance,” Weems’s piece meditates on Native culture, conversing with Sitting Bull, Sioux women, and the complex politics of race. Lyrically styled and situated in the embodied effervescence of the author, her piece pulls at the heartstrings of the reader as it lays bare the contested landscape of Native representations in popular culture.

Joshua I. Newman’s article (“[Un]Comfortable in My Own Skin: Articulation, Reflexivity, and the Duality of Self”) is next, ruminating on the tensions and anxieties emerging from his copresent research within cultures of Southern sporting whiteness—namely, those produced in University of Mississippi college football games and NASCAR auto races. Having spent nearly a decade studying identity, performance, and embodiment within the spaces of what he refers to as “the New Sporting South,” Newman reflects upon how his own subject position, his own identity politics, and his own performing flesh shaped the research act(s) in which he was engaged. To this end, he offers a series of philosophical reflections, first noting that cultures of racism, sexism, and patriarchy are still highly active within these local sporting spectacles. He also suggests that his “White skin, Southern drawl, ‘hillbilly’ vernacular, and masculine deportment” allowed seemingly unlimited access to those most exclusive/divisive social spaces. Moreover,

Newman points to specific field encounters to surmise that his entrée into, and engagement with, various exclusively White sporting communities was contingent on his ability to “perform” a (contextually specific) “Southern self.” Finally, Newman posits that in an effort to create change through critical interrogation and critical consciousness raising about these exclusively White, hetero-patriarchal sporting communities, he was most often “read” not as a social justice-seeking researcher/activist but rather as a [re] productive agent of those regressive cultural politics. Thus does he conclude that any politically “progressive” outcomes from this and similar types of qualitative inquiry must be weighed against the symbolic violence created therein and therefrom.

In a similar sense, Andrew Grainger’s article (“Fear and [Self-]Loathing in Academia”) vividly ruminates on his own internal struggles with being a critical scholar and self-described “fan” of his chosen research archive. He toils over his own placeness(es) with the fields of physical culture and academia, volleying a recurring “self-loathing” of his sport-mystified Self against a critical researcher Self that should not be deceived by such ludic mystifications. Grainger writes about how he struggles to reconcile the flag passions elided by the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team—to come to terms with how his sporting endeavors, both as critical researcher and fervent supporter, are plagued by a conscience troubled by the race politics, nationalistic narratives, and hetero-patriarchal technologies operating through the All Black leviathan. He points to the obvious contradictions that burden contemporary scholars of physical culture, many of whom work at corporate universities, write and teach about exploitation (of athletes, of workers, of consumers, etc.) Monday through Friday, and then cheer their employer’s quasiprofessional football teams with tomahawk vigor on Saturdays. Those conflicting binaries—of politics and passion, of sporting *jouissance* and intellectual pragmatism, of us and them (for Grainger, this is manifest in New Zealand’s “tall poppy” nationalism versus what many Kiwi’s believe to be more crude versions on display in other postcolonies)—can, for Grainger, be prohibitive and yet might at the same time hold agonistic potential. As he notes, “Hypocrisy may in fact act as a kind of strategic resource, allowing us to inhabit separate, or even multiple, spaces, providing us room for experimentation or even to lay the groundwork for resistance.” In closing, Grainger offers no easy or definitive answers, or simple calls for reflexivity but rather for a *generative reflexivity* that moves our politics and our passions forward in a politically committed, emotionally charged direction.

Exemplifying a similar reflexive commitment, Jennifer L. Metz’s article (“Dancing in the Shadows of War”) weaves a complex, messy, fractured narrative on the performance of gendered sporting normativity and racialized masculinity. Using the relationship between the image of Pat Tillman and

the athletes on the popular television show *Dancing With the Stars* as archetypes of hypermasculine (sporting males) over and against excerpts from her students’ self-reflexive stories of gender, Metz explores ways of developing a performative pedagogy that looks at culture, the body and bodily production, and movements and experiences from a critically engaged, personal and moral perspective. In so doing, Metz synthesizes the corporeal with the pedagogical, the theoretical with the [auto-]ethnographic, and the intimate with the popular to problematize the sport-war nexus and its moorings to the academic-industrial-complex. She presents a series of performative student essays, or what Denzin (1997) calls “mystories,” within which the authors were encouraged to reflect on sport’s gendering practices against the backdrop of “permanent war.” Metz arranges these powerful essays—offering deep-cutting reflections on the power and politics activated through sport or vivid portrayals of war’s human costs—in dialogue with contemplations of her own written and bodily texts, her own academic self, her femininity, her Whiteness, and her subjectivity. To this end, she draws upon feminist and critical whiteness scholars to unpack autoethnographic narratives of contemporary “American” manhood, soldierhood, and sporting masculinity. On the whole, Metz at once offers a crystalline commentary on orders of national masculinity, and, as a result, delves into the politics she brought to life through teaching, writing, and interpreting physical culture in its performative and narrative forms.

While not explicitly focusing on active sporting bodies (or representations, histories, or consumption thereof), Sarah L. Rasmusson’s article (“‘We’re Real Here’: Hooters Girls, Big Tips, and Provocative Research Methods”) offers an important study on the emotional labors and embodied politics of sports bar-working “Hooters Girls.” In her article, Rasmusson deliberates on four “research subjectivities” at work within her Hooters ethnography—the publically perceived Hooters Girl; “young, working women” at a local Hooters restaurant; qualitative research methodology; and Rasmusson herself as qualitative researcher (and once a former full-time waitress). She writes about her experiences in the field, dialoguing with women she met at the restaurant while simultaneously reflecting on her own previous waitressing experience in an upscale New York bistro. By crystallizing the empirical, the reflexive, and the methodological, Rasmusson suggests that qualitative researchers could learn from “Hooters Girls” and her experiences at the local Hooters restaurant. She points to various moments of conversation, or observation, to explain how conventional postpositivistic qualitative inquiry, as well as feminist theory itself, does not and probably cannot fully account for feelings of autarky and agency that many Hooters girls share while at work. At the same time, she writes about the politics of Whiteness that seem to pervade over Hooters’ “Barbie Doll,” “All-American,” and “blonded” emphasized femininities. In the end, Rasmusson’s article tells a story of the complicated

nature of subjectivity, whereby “Hooters Girls” are subjected to objectivizing forces (of heterosexism, of capitalism, of the researcher’s gaze, even of feminism) while simultaneously crafting subjective working lives and operationalizing technologies of the self that challenge these disciplinary regimes.

In the Special Issue’s final piece, Claudio Moreira recounts the story of Conde and Zezao, two competing representations of a Ponte Preta soccer fan living with and among fragments of violence, identity, and embodiment. In the first half of the article, Moreira synthesizes news stories and narratives surrounding a particular sporting event—an event which would put Conde’s life in peril—with his own firsthand observations as someone who has lived as “an Other.” He then turns in the second part of the piece to his own place within the research—how as a Brazilian man, as a child of poverty, as a researcher who has not moved beyond his habitus, he is written into the story of Conde, into the way it was conceived and mediated, into the politics it evokes. In doing so, Moreira interrogates “methodology, theories, and experiences from the intersection of apparatus of oppression, trying to promote social justice,” while at the same time opening himself up—[re]presenting in sometimes painful prose his own body and the shackles of subjectivity that weigh upon it. However, as he then makes clear, this auto-ethnographic self, written through an ethnographic encounter with Conde, brings with it a wide range of complications: Whose agenda is at work in this rendering? Whose body matters? How are the fragments to be arranged? With whose pedagogical or performative interests in mind? He summarizes not with answers to these questions but by turning his attention back on to his body—the body of a borderlands child, a “poor” child of Brazil, a body of Brazil, and a body of purpose.

Coda

Under a physical cultural studies sensibility, the moving body (of the researcher, of the participant, of the complex interplay between the two, and so on) activates culture; that is, active bodies emerge out of and are implicated in cultural practices. Importantly, and reworking Marx and later C. Wright Mills (1959), we must acknowledge that “*individuals make their own cultural physicalities and navigate their own bodily passages, but not under conditions of their own choosing*” (Giardina & Newman, 2011c, p. 41, emphasis in original). Thus does the body move through a multilayered web of historical and contextual constraints held together by social, cultural, political, and economic dynamics. Such an understanding has been carefully debated and made clear by many of the fields’ predominant voices (e.g., Andrews, 2008; Andrews & Silk, 2011; Hargreaves & Vertinsky, 2006; Ingham, 1985; Markula & Pringle, 2006), and successfully deployed in a wide range of important studies

on topics as diverse as neoliberal citizenship (Dworkin & Wachs, 2009), biomedical ethics (Miah, 2004), and the social determinants of health (Wheatley, 2006).

Yet while such developments have laid the critical groundwork for this line of inquiry, we believe there is more to the physical cultural studies enterprise than just doing “body work” (i.e., conducting critical investigations of the body as material form, semiotic system, contested formation, and so forth in which “the body” is an *object* or *artifact of culture* to be studied in textual or material form). Rather, our version of physical cultural studies complicates the ethnographic imagination altogether: As participants and performers, we’re not just *studying* movement and moving bodies—we’re implicated in and cocreating the spaces of physical culture in which we move and which we represent (whether in narrative or poetic form). Thus, in writing ourselves into our research act/s, we do not seek to only describe or interpret our own cultural physicalities as we experienced them—or even to put forth a self-reflexive portrait of the researcher.

Instead, we seek awareness and understanding that the researcher’s embodied self—once set in motion and moving within cultural spaces—*produces* the very cultural physicalities he or she experiences. As expressed in this Special Issue, then, there is more to Sarah Rasmusson’s article than a deconstructive exposition of Hooters Girls articulated to gender performativity, and there is more to Jennifer Guiliano’s article than a critique of the historical body within and against the throes of disciplinary positivism: Once your own body (i.e., the body of the researcher) and its body politics are set in motion, you become intimately articulated and necessarily contingent to that which you study, as well as all of the complications, contradictions, messiness, and struggles that come with it. Such a project thus answers the call of Cameron McCarthy and his colleagues (2007), who implore us to “present the texts of our lives as mutually and reciprocally *co-articulated* to the world and the subjects in that world” (p. xx, emphasis added) as we move forward toward a more progressive future.

In a sense, then, such a physical cultural studies sees progress and movement as crisscrossing political and axiological pathways—a twin helix enwrapping the self and other, conjoining the physical and the possible, suturing the lived to the textual, and binding the performative with the pedagogical. To learn physical culture is to live physical culture. Our bodies have always been there, in spaces of physicality we inhabit (as scholars, as cultural beings, as consumers, etc.). Now it is time to move those bodies—with all their complexities and vulnerabilities—out from the shadows of our techniques and into our texts.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Norman K. Denzin for his critical feedback on an earlier version of this article and for allowing them the forum

of guest editing this Special Issue of *Cultural Studies* ↔ *Critical Methodologies*. Special thanks to Michele K. Donnelly for our continuing conversations on this topic and for her early engagement in this project.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Broadly speaking, *ethnography* “is that form of inquiry and writing that produces descriptions and accounts about the ways of life of the writer and those written about” (Denzin, 1997, p. xi). At the turn of the century, writes Fred Erickson (2011), the goal of ethnography was indeed a positivist one: the “accurate collection of facts and a comprehensive description of the whole way of life of those who were being studied” (p. 45). As ethnography evolved through various historical moments (traditional, modernist, crisis of representation, etc.; see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), we witnessed the emergence of *critical ethnography*, or an ethnographic project read through the lens of and informed by critical theory. D. Soyini Madison (2005) defines it thusly: “Critical theory finds its method in critical ethnography . . . [in which] ethnography becomes the ‘doing’—or, better, the performance—of critical theory” (p. 13). The *autoethnographic turn* represents a “turning of the ethnographic gaze inward on the self (auto), while maintaining the outward gaze of ethnography, looking at the larger context wherein self experiences occur” (Denzin, 1997, p. 228).
2. As Newman (2011) noted on this point, “I have come to realize that the very act of identifying privilege, riddled with expectations of how cultures of power are transmitted, is itself problematic on a number of levels. Further, I have learned that acts of power and privilege are often as elusive as the jetsetting oligarchs or backwoods patriarchs who create them. In sum, the study of power can never be limited by unidirectional parallax” (p. 12).
3. Keeping in mind that “the body” is not neutral—it is discursively performed in and through a multiplicity of raced, classed, sexed, gendered, queered, and dis/abled forms, contexts, and negotiations.
4. Although the reader will note that many of the articles in this Special Issue take up particular orientation to *sporting* bodies (in various iterations), we should make clear that such work in the field is not solely limited to the sporting endeavor.
5. We understand physical cultural studies to be a field of inquiry in which a focus on physical culture (sport, the body, movement, etc.) is read through or informed by the (British) cultural studies tradition. The tradition of physical cultural studies loosely begins with Alan Ingham’s (1985) landmark essay in the *Sociology of Sport Journal* (“From Public Sociology to Personal Trouble: Well-Being and the Fiscal Crisis of the State”) and moves most notably through various theoretical and methodological engagements and developments at the University of Illinois (e.g., the work of David Andrews, Toni Bruce, C. L. Cole, Jim Denison, Marcelo Diversi, Michael Giardina, Jennifer Guiliano, Jeremy Howell, Amy Hribar, Steven Jackson, Samantha King, Kyle Kusz, Pirkko Markula, Jennifer Metz, Claudio Moreira, Geneviève Rail, and Synthia Sydnor, much of which emerged in conversation with Norman Denzin over the past 20 years) and the University of Maryland (the later work of Andrews, along with that of Callie Batts, Michael Friedman, Andrew Grainger, Joshua Newman, Ryan King-White, Jaime Schultz, and Michael Silk), as well as some of the foundational work of Jennifer Hargreaves, Toby Miller, Brian Pronger, and Patricia Vertinsky. For a comprehensive discussion of physical cultural studies, see Giardina and Newman (2011a, 2011c); for a slightly different view, see Silk and Andrews (2011).
6. Although we agree with John Amis and Michael Silk’s (2008) definitional point that “terms such as *researcher* and *research subject* . . . very clearly portray where power lies in the research process” (p. 470), we clearly mean to trouble those relationships within the research act.
7. Douglas Macbeth’s (2001) definition is as good as any: “Reflexivity is a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersections of author, other, text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (p. 35).
8. As the anthropologist Edward M. Bruner (1993) reminds us: “The idea of a scientific, supposedly objective, ethnographic report that left the individual observer out of the account is not only a *cliché*, it is an impossibility. Every ethnographer inevitably leaves traces in the text” (p. 2).
9. To be clear, this is not a slight on performance studies or those who operate under its umbrella; rather, we are encouraging scholars—especially those who explicitly do body work—to consider the [auto-]ethnographer’s [embodied] performativity at the moments and passages of social encounter that generate these texts.
10. For let us never forget, the biopolitical technologies of the Self—those guarded by subject formations, surveillance, normalization, governmentality, and value judgments—operate on the *researcher* just as they do on the researched.
11. As Nabhan-Warren (2011) writes in conjoining the two: “When we write our embodiment into our work, we acknowledge how the anthropologist’s and the interlocutor’s bodies interact; the ethnographer’s body is deeply intertwined within the lifeworld. It is precisely because of this intertwinedness of the ethnographer and those with whom she works in the field that clear-cut distinctions between emic/insider and etic/outsider cannot be maintained as the ethnographer is more of a shapeshifter, one who takes on multiple forms in the field” (p. 384).

12. That is, jumping with a parachute from a fixed object; e.g., buildings, antennas, spans (bridges), and earth (cliffs).
13. In a landmark article, Howard Becker (1967) proposed that all sociologists (and, we would add, all critical theorists) are invariably partisan, that there can never be such a thing as objectivity, and that they should explicitly proclaim “whose side we are on.” This politics of “taking sides” is explicitly embedded in the act of announcing ones politics.
14. Importantly, for our purposes in physical cultural studies, there is both a “discursive self-reflexivity” and an “embodied self-reflexivity” at work at once and the same. As Michal Pagis (2009) defines, this is “a process based predominantly on language, in which the relation with oneself unfolds through a symbolic medium, by way of practices such as talking to oneself or talking to others . . . [and] a process based predominantly on the feeling body, in which the relation with oneself unfolds through a corporeal medium by way of practices that increase awareness and sensations” (p. 266).
15. This section is drawn from Newman (2011).
16. Spatial constraints limit us from any detailed discussion on neoliberalism. In oversimplified terms, let it suffice to say that our use of “neoliberalism” here is in reference to the political economic movement that today holds sway over most developed nation-states. In media speak, we tend to hear less polarizing synonyms such as “free enterprise,” the “free market,” the “enterprise economy,” or quite simply, the economy. In both theoretical and ideological terms, a neoliberal doctrine assumes that *only* through the freeing of markets and market-based relationships can (a) an individual achieve autonomy and (b) a given society reach its greatest potential. Such exponents of this doctrine, asserts Paul Krugman (2007) are radical in that they base their reforms on two simple assumptions: “that markets always work and that only markets work” (p. 6). For more, see Harvey (2007).
17. We need not look far to find public pedagogies of the body that have been marshaled into the mainstream during the neoliberal transformation. For example, we are told that the bodies protesting market reform—those of unionized workers, teachers, and public workers such as police officers and firefighters—are a hindrance to the economy, are selfish, and are a nuisance to progress. In Michigan, Texas, and Ohio, free-market proponents have launched an attack on the laboring body in particular—often under suppositions of public sectors working as underutilizing the productive capacities of their working bodies. These neoliberal bio-pedagogies permeate traditional educative spaces such as the classroom, as well as mass mediated public pedagogical spaces.
18. Yes, each of these and many more are significant features of the contemporary physical cultural landscape. But what we as a field have failed to do is fully explore the ways in which individuals or groups encounter, negotiate, and are often subordinated to these cultural formations; that is, the field has by and large neglected to adhere to that most basic logic of cultural studies: that of the theory and method of articulation. This we take up in greater detail in Giardina and Newman (2011a).
19. By studying culture, we often turn our critique into prosaic detritus lost in the twin obelisks of abstractionism and relativism. From these lofty heights, we are able to fend off critiques of method, of rigor, of substance—but to what effect?

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