museum is a language of completion, and in that language is surely a truth told slant.


Reviewed by Jody Shipka, University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

In the foreword to Getting Under the Skin: Body and Media Theory, Mark Hansen locates the text's "theoretical payoff" in its fourth and final chapter, "The Medium is the Body," where Wegenstein ties all "loose threads together" and where her analysis of contemporary media converges with a rehabilitation of certain strands in phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and feminism in order to generate a powerful conceptualization of the human as a form of distributed embodiment, an "organ instead of a body," that does not so much demarcate itself against an environment as extend seamlessly and robustly into the now ubiquitously digitized technosphere. (xii)

I begin with this excerpt from Hansen's foreword because it helps prepare readers for what can be a particularly challenging read given the way the text is structured and the range and number of theories/theorists Bernadette Wegenstein, an assistant professor of media study and director of the film studies program at the University of Buffalo, draws on throughout the text. For example, in a move that foregrounds the breadth and scope of the theoretical insights and practical examples she will offer readers, Wegenstein, in the preface to Getting Under the Skin, indicates that it was largely the result of experiencing Gunther von Hagens' Body Worlds exhibit in Vienna in 1999, and reading N. Katherine Hayles' How We Became Posthuman, published that same year, that she became increasingly convinced that something important was "happening to the body"
(xvii). Following this, Wegenstein details briefly her “journey” into body criticism, one that has been informed, sustained, and complicated, that is to say (in keeping with the focus of the text), one that has been mediated by media theory, cognitive science, feminist theory, phenomenology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, architecture, advertising, new media and performance art, as well as anatomy/sexuality studies.

In the first chapter of the book, “Making Room for the Body,” Wegenstein begins foregrounding aspects of her broad and truly interdisciplinary journey, drawing on select historical “fragments” and key theoretical concepts from anatomy studies, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, cognitive studies, and feminist theory to begin demonstrating how the concept of bodily fragmentation, in circulation since the sixteenth century, has, in the twentieth century (thanks largely to new media’s “logic of dispersion”) been integrated into a holistic concept—one that suggests that the history of the body is, in fact, a history of mediation. It is in this chapter that Wegenstein introduces readers to the central claims she is making about bodies and embodiment, claims that will be illustrated and further developed in the remaining chapters of the text. Here, she claims, firstly, that the history of the body-in-pieces is the history of the struggle between fragmented and holistic concepts of the body. According to Wegenstein, “the apparently contrary vectors of fragmentation and holism [that is, the interrelation/accumulation of body parts and pieces] are in fact part and parcel of the same historical development”; this being the case, “there can be no history of the body that is not at the same time a study of the various media that constitute embodiment as such” (35–36). As for her second claim, Wegenstein maintains that while the body has the capacity to disappear, embodiment—defined here as the experience of being-in-the-world and of thought, and regarded as form of articulation that is inherently performative—cannot.

In the chapter entitled “Body Performances from 1960s Wounds to 1990s Extensions,” Wegenstein examines a 40-year period in the history of bodily performance art in an attempt to trace the connections between “live” performances (the body as raw, and oftentimes displayed as “wounded,” material) and new media-based treatments of the body. Wegenstein begins by examining how an “increasingly intensified me-
"dia-environment" impacted the body performances associated with the 1960s actionism or "happening" movement (37); readers familiar with Geoffrey Sirc's *English Composition as a Happening*, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, and Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media* may find particularly compelling Wegenstein's treatment of these Dadaist-inspired "disturbances" of public spaces. According to Wegenstein, these performances—performances that enacted mass media-related tropes such as simultaneity, fragmentation, heterogeneity, multiplication, acceleration, and indeterminacy, and that in so doing attempted to blur the boundaries between life and art, body and environment, artistic process and product—followed the "double logic of remediation" as the choreographers of these oftentimes brief events would attempt "to appropriate and stage all possible facets of the artistic form, and to pretend that there is no mediation involved by integrating artistic scenarios into natural environments . . . and the accidental spectator from the street" (39).

Drawing heavily on Allan Kaprow's work—his 1959 text, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*, as well as *Self-Service: A Happening* (1967)—Wegenstein also underscores in this chapter the importance of the "chance factor" associated with happening performances, maintaining that it "anticipates a digitized environment for performance art that will culminate in the hypermediated 1990s extensions" (58). To illustrate how body discourse in performance art changed between the 1960s and 1990s, Wegenstein gestures toward the work of Australian performance artist Stelios Arcadiou (Stelarc), suggesting that it accurately represents the transition between the performances of the 1960s and 1970s (performances that, following Duchamp, treat the body as a modified or modifiable ready-made and focus primarily on the vulnerability of embodiment) and the new media-based performances that afford bodies the potential of extending themselves into digital spaces. These latter performances foreground instead the vulnerability of disembodiment by treating the body and its parts as pure potential, or as "a contingency—a system out of control and in the hands of others" (74).

In the third chapter of the text, "How Faces Have Become Obsolete," Wegenstein concentrates specifically on the ways in which popular science texts/technologies, the arts, advertising, and fashion have "gotten
increasingly under the skin" (79). As indicated by the chapter title, a key move made here has to do with demonstrating, primarily through a series of advertisements, how any body part—exterior, interior, or surface/skin—of the fragmented, posthuman body can be made to stand in for or reveal something of the whole. As Wegenstein writes, “Any body part can now gain the status once exclusively enjoyed by a face as a window to the soul. It is not necessarily behind faces that we expect the person to be revealed. Faces are becoming obsolete” (89). To illustrate this move, Wegenstein points to a series of advertisements for beauty products and fashion accessories. In one advertisement, an ad for Oil of Olay body wash, a portion of the ad text, which is placed along the model’s thigh, reads: “Words usually reserved for your face are now possible all over your body.” This is not to say that faces have been erased, since Wegenstein offers readings of other texts where faces still remain the focal points of the ads. Rather, what Wegenstein is most interested in tracing here are instances where interior and exterior, the virtual and the real, merge—where the accumulation of bodily pieces and parts appear to mesh with, or otherwise reflect, environments and aspects of the nonhuman. Like the examples offered in the previous chapter, these examples provide Wegenstein with a way of concretely demonstrating how questions about media and (re)mediation have “literally taken over the space and place of the individual body” (121).

I began by suggesting that Getting Under the Skin may prove to be a challenging read for those who are not familiar with the number and range of theorists and cultural/technological examples Wegenstein draws upon throughout her text. I also indicated that the structure of the book, the way its parts and pieces are organ-ized, or engineered to unfold, may also prove challenging. Insofar as the text is structured in ways that appear to allow Wegenstein to enact, and by way of this, to further underscore the import of the argument she is advancing here about the relationship between the body, embodiment, environment, nonlinearity/dispersion, and (new) media, I believe one is tempted to treat the text in a manner keeping with the way Wegenstein advocates we understand the millennial body, namely, “as a conglomerate of ‘nonlinear strata,’ and ‘interacting accumulations’” (120). According to Wegenstein, to treat the body in this way allows us to move beyond a concern with the substitution of body
parts and pieces (for example, what part has replaced or might be understood as a stand-in for another?) and to begin asking questions about “how and in what configuration” bodies/body parts have been accumulated and (re)mediated (120).

To be sure, the way the text itself has been designed and produced encourages a traditional linear, front-to-back, held-between-hands, cover-to-cover read, but it’s tempting, and I think especially fitting given the theoretical emphasis placed on media here, and the inclusion of, to my count, 50 black and white still images, to imagine high-tech alternatives to that design, alternatives that could allow more room for play, both with various forms of media as well as with readers’ reception of or experience with the text. What if, for instance, in keeping with Bolter and Grusin’s Remediation, Getting Under the Skin provided readers with printed equivalents to hyperlinks, a move that would facilitate, if not explicitly encourage, a more dispersed, nonlinear engagement with the rich assortment of “theoretical insights and practical examples,” or to my way of thinking, the “interacting accumulations” Wegenstein offers readers? Going still further, it’s tempting to imagine the potentials associated with a colorized, multiply-media-rich hypertextual version of Getting Under the Skin, something that would afford a different kind of engagement (or different kinds of engagement) with the interrelating, interacting parts and pieces Wegenstein provides us here.


Reviewed by Maggie Werner, University of Arizona

For the past four years, I have been running around proclaiming that my research interest is sexual rhetorics. Generally, people meet my declaration with serious looks, an understanding nod, and a change of subject. It occurred to me last semester when I was doing research into the commer-