

WHAT A BODY CAN DO

“New Performance” @ CSI
Prof. Maurya Wickstrom

Guest: Ben Spatz, September 20, 2013

Whence the importance of the ethical question. *We do not even know of what a body is capable*, says Spinoza. That is: *We do not even know of what affections we are capable, nor the extent of our power*. How could we know this in advance? ... We can know by reasoning that the power of action is the sole expression of our essence, the sole affirmation of our power of being affected. But this knowledge remains abstract. We do not know what this power is, nor how we may acquire or discover it. And we will certainly never know this, if we do not concretely try to become active.

— Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy* (1990: 226)

Please read the attached essays and prepare a **five-minute embodied response** to this question:

What can a body do?

You should prepare to demonstrate a capacity of your embodiment, but what that means is up to you. How does one demonstrate what a body can do? Is there anything that all bodies can do? Something your body can do that other bodies cannot? Something others can do that you cannot? What are the limits of embodiment in general and of your specific embodiment? Does your body have different capacities at different times of the day, month, or lifetime? What *can't* a body do? Which body? Whose body? When?

Our goal is to create a space in which a wide range of bodily capacities is demonstrated. These may be impressive, exhausting, thoughtful, messy, profound, vulnerable, intriguing, or just plain silly. A wide range of tones and qualities is desirable. Think of this as a chance to present another side of yourself.

Here are some ideas to get you going, but this is not an exhaustive list:

- martial arts
- folk songs or show tunes
- dance improvisations
- demonstrations of athletic prowess
- monologues or performance art
- displays of virtuosity or limitation or exposure or grace or failure
- something only you can do with your tongue, elbow, spine, etc.
- something tender
- something weird

Props and accessories are welcome, but there will be no technical support, so please bring your own tech. **Each enactment must have a title in the form: “A body can _____.”** You will announce the title of your presentation before sharing it.

Be prepared to share your demonstration in class on **September 20th**. Be prepared also to discuss your presentation, the attached readings, and the questions raised by the event as a whole.