

## Preface

It was during the research for my dissertation, *The Representation of AIDS in the European Media*,<sup>1</sup> that a deep interest in the body as culture stirred in me. Specifically after having read such books on the body in the field of literature and science as N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), I knew that there was something of deep importance *happening* to the body. After visiting Gunther von Hagens's controversial *Körperwelten*<sup>2</sup> (*Body Worlds*) exhibit in Vienna in early 1999, in which I witnessed plastinated cadavers posing as chess players or pregnant women, I decided to study this body discourse that had very literally and obviously *gotten under the skin*. Thus began my journey into body criticism, which very soon brought me to cognitive science, media theory, phenomenology, philosophy, psychoanalysis, as well as science and literature studies, and more practically to the study of popular culture such as advertisement, as well as to architecture and new media art. First, however, the journey into body criticism brought me back to the invention of anatomy and of the female sex and sexuality in early modernity.

Chapter 1, *Making Room for the Body*, examines current body criticism by way of its key concepts, which serve as paradigms for the applied analyses throughout the remainder of the book. This introductory chapter describes how the body became an object of critical study from early modernity's anatomical practices to twentieth-century thought, taking into consideration phenomenology, psychoanalysis, cognitive science, and feminist theory, and their specific contributions to a new body concept. Different factors have played an important role in the redefinition of subjectivity and individuality (as well as in the various reports of their demise) within this body discourse: the discovery of the

unconscious, specifically Lacan's fractal body image in psychoanalysis; new biomedical technologies (for example, of reproduction), and new medical visualization practices of screening the body; discussions in gender studies and feminist theory on what or who the body is; as well as the rise of new media. Chapter 1 has two main theses, which form the basis for *Getting Under the Skin*: The first thesis is that the history of a body-in-pieces is a history of a struggling relationship between a fragmented and a holistic body concept, for which the rest of the book delivers a body of evidence; the second thesis is that, despite the body's capacity to "disappear" (as, ostensibly, with the digital image), embodiment cannot. The experience of being-in-the-world and of thought is therefore an experience of embodiment. Moreover, embodiment—being akin to articulation—is inherently performative, which leads to the next chapter on the history of performance art throughout the twentieth century.

Chapter 2, *Body Performances from 1960s Wounds to 1990s Extensions*, shows how throughout the rise of the mediatized environment of the twentieth century, and especially under the influence of the early Avant-garde (for example, Futurism), performance art first collapsed into the body and, during the last decades, extended itself more and more into new digital spaces. The claim is that the blurring of the differences between the environment and its content, materialities and their use, process and product have been inspired by an augmented awareness and production of mediation. After situating body-oriented art in the late twentieth century, chapter 2 discusses the body as *raw material* performed in 1960s Wounds, and the body experiments and their relationship with technology in 1990s Extensions. The third chapter, *How Faces Have Become Obsolete*, describes popular medical techniques for visualizing the human body and the attempt to control and dominate the body's interior. Furthermore, it studies the abundance of organ images and other penetrations of the skin in today's popular culture, and the resulting strategies of *getting under the skin*. The examples used in this chapter stem from advertisements, high fashion, film, and other popular domains, and show how the skin and other organs have been "freed" and separated from the idea of an entire body, as well as how these freely floating body parts have taken on the role of pure mediation, of flat screen, of the *sur-face* on which the body as such is produced. For this move to happen, the face as principle mediator of the soul had to become obsolete, a fact that the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whose theory of the body is discussed in this chapter, had foreseen long before. The fourth and final chapter, *The Medium is the Body*, argues by way of an analysis of current trends in ar-

chitecture and new media art that the discipline of body criticism is in fact deeply connected and indebted to the discipline of media criticism. Chapter 4 invokes a neophenomenological critique of the digital image, explaining its development into affectivity (Hansen) and corporealization. This new approach to body criticism has literally replaced the study of the semiotics of media, as the body is no longer allowed merely to stand in for something else (as in Nietzsche's metaphorical concept discussed in chapter 1), but rather the medium has *become* the body. This move was facilitated by the advent of new media in the twentieth century, since through new media's new logic of dispersion the body could free itself from its inner universe and its organs (Deleuze), the inside merging with the outside and the very body surface or skin collapsing and flattening out. In conclusion, both theoretical insights and practical examples are brought to bear in arguing that the history of the body is a history of constitutive mediation in which both fragmentation and holism were, and are, indispensable modes of imagining and configuring the body.