



The Inaugural Game Changer: Bodies as Collective Inquiry

Game changer

Written by the Bodies Collective

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The Concern: Our main philosophy

The inaugural Game Changer, for the 2018 European Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, hosted in Leuven Belgium, became a place of pushing at the boundaries and silence placed upon the material body – the corporeal site of intra-actions (Barad, 2007; 2014) and becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Within this nascent group of predominantly early career researchers, our concerns at exploring the body were varied, divergent and presented an exciting opportunity to flatten academic hierarchies through conversations and movements aimed at seeing, perhaps even appreciating, the corporeal body anew. Conversations continued between those privileged and resourced enough to attend ICQI in May 2018 and have woven their way through our time over recent months. Each of our fields presented diffracting facets in which to seek knowledge on the body. Yet, one key philosophical tenant remained consistent: Our bodies are the first point of contact with another. In fact, our bodies are the relational entry point into knowing another (Merleau-Ponty, 1968, Gergen 2009). Each of us, within our own disciplines, have experienced how the body has not been privileged within varying Western academic discourses (Grosz, 1994; Young, 2006; 2008).

For us, the subjugation of bodies is particularly troubling when bodies are brought together for a conference. In the conference space, bodies become something different than the lone researcher who writes and works alone; in classrooms, symposiums, standing out in front of colleagues, sweating with nerves, bodies now meet other bodies to share ideas, are judged, assessed, and work to impress others. At the end of a conference, these bodies often become just plain tired.

The affective, relational, embodied turn is now swelling (Cromby 2012, Shotter 1983, Neville 2015) as researchers start to explore from within the moment of the research relationship to examine intra-action (Barad 2007). And within the conference space of ECQI 2018, a group who had met the year previously and worked, played, explored and wrote together in Spain a few months before, decided to create an open space in which to express concern about the absence of the body in our reading, writing and academic studies. It also emerged with a concern about the hierarchical nature of bodies within the academy, including in relation to gender, age, 'race', skin colour, sexuality, non-disability/disability.

The Game Changer 2018

The main methodological question tackled within presenting the Game Changer for ECQI was *how*: *How* to challenge the hierarchical structure and subjugation of bodies in a conference space? To speak into this, we played with the idea of nomadism, of allowing openness and the unknown, to allow us to embody the entangled *becoming* (Barad 2007) and break down the top-down researcher-audience dichotomy.

To do this, on the first day we invited participants to pick from a series of workshops presented by us; for example, 'the body and dance', 're-birthing exercise with breath work'; 'the outside body through photography', and 'voice within one's particular body'. This choice allowed others to choose what mattered to them, and allowed for collaboration and play.

At the end of the first day, the *becoming* environment of this workshop took shape as we asked participants what *they* might want to do for the second day. We did not know what might be chosen for this second day, a bigger fear being that participants would not take to this nomadic approach and prefer a typical 'top-down' structure. However, we were blown away with the level of interest and suggestions from the group – so much so that the whole second day was organised and run entirely by participants! In the following Plenary session, it was their voices through quotes and comments that led the discussion, and many more from the conference asked to add their names to an email list and desiring to be a part of this project. The collaboration of the 'Bodies Collective' group had fully commenced

The Year's Progress

Now, a year later, we prepare for ECQI 2019, this time hosted in Edinburgh Scotland. The Bodies Collective has grown and continued to meet together – attending to ways in which we celebrate the body in our works, through what we have named 'Body-ography'. We found each other in creative and informal as well as formal spaces on retreat, at conferences, over skype and through sharing our written words. We continue to seek, to find and to include others with shared interests; to collaborate, to learn together, each at momentary points holding and sharing their individual expertise in the service of developing collective knowledge. We seek to flatten and make fluid hierarchical structures and overcome academic hero-worship or body

ideals, appreciating and celebrating each other's contributions as unique and at the same time situated in relations.

In becoming tangled together, we uncover the ways in which the body has been used, abused, and ignored throughout academia. We also celebrate the ways it has and can yet be the focus of understandings.

Our current outputs

Through the intersections of our work together we are privileging space to showcase our knowledge and relationships with and through the body. The concepts of Autonomous pedagogy and Body-ography have emerged from this work and we work to bring forth these ideas through workshops and symposiums presented for this year's ECQI 2019, as well as in the long-term vision of writing a collaborative book on Body-ography.

The support, both financial and practical – for this work is enabling *something* to grow, something that is both within ourselves and in the materiality of our work. Our shared interest in emergent, becoming, intra-active, epistemo-ontologies provides a containing and permeable holder in which we can play, work, cry and be.

How will we know if this is useful?

Bodies matter as *matter*. The physical form delights, infuriates, is covetous, ravenous, and the mode in which all engagement takes place. This happens through the mysterious intersection of both corporeal and incorporeal as histories, memories, space, time, and psychologies entangle together – creating an impression of another in milliseconds. How profound!

We seek to push these discussions forward – of delighting in mystery and play - by creating space for people to recognise and enjoy their bodily space, at conference sessions, accepted journal submissions, conversations that encompass and are extended by this STUFF...tracking how our words are infection, how the collective grows. Academic is replete with ideas about impact, value and quality – and we are honoured to welcome our bodies and voices to the choir of inquiry.

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