

Call for Abstracts for Issue 21 (Spring 2027)

Embodiment

Guest Editors: Alexandra Stuhlmann and Siyu Li

Since the so-called “corporeal turn” of the 1980s and 1990s, bodies have become a central concern across the social sciences and humanities (e.g., Csordas 1999, Shilling 2003, Sheets-Johnstone 2009, Tambornino 2002). As a result, embodiment has emerged as a key analytical lens across a number of disciplines. Csordas (1994:6) famously conceptualizes it as “the existential ground of culture and self,” thereby foregrounding the body as the starting point for analyzing how culture and self take shape. Within embodiment research, scholars have approached the body in multiple ways, including as a central medium through which social life is constituted (Shilling 2005), and as the site of perception, lived experience, and embodied engagement with the world (Csordas 1994). Embodiment itself has been understood as a performative phenomenon that shifts attention from having a body to being and doing bodies (Ellingson 2017). Together, these perspectives highlight that bodies are not fixed entities but emerge through ongoing social, experiential, and practical dynamics. Here, body points to the situated, material, and sensed entity, while embodiment draws attention to the processes through which such entities are continuously constituted in relations and practices, shifting analytical focus from what the body is to how bodies come to be and to matter.

Despite the crucial role this scholarship has played in redirecting attention to the body, embodiment is often addressed in separate theoretical and disciplinary conversations across cultural studies, the social sciences, and the life sciences. In this 21st issue of *On_Culture*, we explore how bodies come into being through intersecting cultural, social, and biological dynamics. Approaching embodiment as a plural phenomenon, we examine how these processes interact to form bodies that, in turn, generate cultural meanings and practices.

To bring these dynamics into a shared analytical focus, this issue foregrounds four interrelated dimensions of embodiment. It thus opens up novel vistas for revisiting the “corporeal turn” of the 1990s, this time from a contemporary cultural studies perspective, asking what relational approaches can offer interdisciplinary analyses of culture today.

Firstly, bodies come into being as composite formations. Rather than taking shape as a single, unified entity, bodies are formed through uneven and selective attention to specific organs, tissues, microbes, diseases, or risks: from uteruses in reproductive policies to hormones in endocrine disruptor regulations between the Global North and South. Each medical, scientific,

and care practice brings its own version of the body into being, with its own realities, norms, and forms of evidence, rendering bodies ontologically multiple (Mol 2002).

Secondly, bodies emerge through relational forms of agency. Bodily processes unfold through ongoing engagements with environments, materials, infrastructures, and technologies, not simply as expressions of human intention. They are forged instead as outcomes of situated encounters, as when bodies co-adapt with plant ecologies through practices of cultivation and consumption, or urban spaces organize patterns of movement and exposure. Through such entanglements, bodies and worlds co-evolve, recasting embodiment as an inherently more-than-human process.

Thirdly, bodies come into being through techniques, understood here as structured, repeatable forms of embodied knowledge that can be taught, transmitted, and refined (Spatz 2015). In practice, these techniques are enacted in situated and adaptive ways, for instance sensing and managing satiety in eating, or coordinating rhythm in dancing. Through their repeated enactment in such activities, embodied skills and capacities are cultivated and stabilized, thereby contributing to the formation of specific bodies.

Fourthly, bodies are formed through regimes of visibility and interpretation. These structure how bodies become legible and meaningful within specific sociocultural contexts, shaping which bodies and bodily practices are recognized, valued, or marginalized. In contemporary media and digital environments, algorithmically structured modes of visibility intensify the circulation and comparison of bodies, for example through widely circulating formats that stage bodily transformation or invite participation in body-related challenges, mediating how bodies emerge in social life.

Taken together, these dimensions suggest that bodies take shape through the dynamic cultural interplay of bodily practices, relations, environments, and forms of knowledge rather than through a single or linear process. We invite contributions that engage with one or several of these dimensions and address potential questions such as: how do bodies come into being across different sociocultural and material contexts? How does the concept of embodiment challenge the boundaries of the body, both physically and semiotically? And how might embodiment serve as an analytical lens for work in the interdisciplinary field of cultural studies? Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Bodily shapes, gendered norms, and trans* embodiment
- Embodied practices and techniques of bodily formation
- Affective and sensory dimensions of embodiment
- Medical, therapeutic, and alternative practices of embodiment
- Body-environment interactions in everyday life
- Bodily resonance and world relationships
- Nonhuman and more-than-human embodiment
- Power, geopolitics, and inequality in the making of bodies
- Media and digital environments as sites of bodily visibility and interpretation
- Future imaginaries of bodies and embodied practices
- Embodied research practices and methodologies

If you are interested in having a peer reviewed academic article featured in this issue of *On_Culture*, please submit an abstract of 300 words with the article title, 5–6 keywords, a short biographical note, and your email address to content@on-culture.org (subject line “Abstract Submission”) no later than **June 1, 2026**. You will be notified by **June 15, 2026** whether your paper proposal has been accepted. The final date for full paper submissions is **September 15, 2026** and the issue will be published in **May 2027**.

Please note: *On_Culture* also features [Perspectives](#), a section devoted to shorter, creative pieces pertaining to each issue topic. These can be interviews, essays, opinion pieces, reviews of exhibitions, analyses of cultural artifacts and events, photo galleries, videos, works of art... and more! These contributions are uploaded on a rolling basis and can be connected to every one of *On_Culture's* issues. Interested in contributing? Send your ideas to the Editorial Team at any time: content@on-culture.org

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On_Culture: The Open Journal for the Study of Culture (ISSN: 2366-4142) is a biannual, Open Access peer-reviewed scholar-led journal edited by doctoral researchers, postdocs, and professors working at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus Liebig University Giessen. It provides a forum for reflecting on the study of culture. It investigates, problematizes, and develops key concepts and methods in the field by means of a collaborative and collective process. *On_Culture* is dedicated to fostering such engagements as well as the cultural dynamics at work in thinking about and reflecting on culture.

The journal consists of three sections: peer-reviewed academic *_Articles*, as well as *_Essays*, and the aforementioned *_Perspectives*. *On_Culture* brings new approaches and emerging topics in the (trans)national study of culture ‘on the line’ and, in so doing, fills the gap__ between ‘on’ and ‘culture.’ There are numerous ways of filling the gap, and a plurality of approaches is something for which the journal strives with each new issue.

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