

# Extended Bodies, Operationalizing Theory: A Guided Practice

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*This is a performative guided thinking/experiencing exercise that goes through ideas of space, connection, accountability, bodies, materiality and ways of spatializing and thinking. This can be listened to or read alone or in groups. It was designed as a way of entering collective or group conversations and practices.*

*This annotated transcript, which points to some references that this exercise draws in, on, from and with, accompanies an audio file of the recorded version. You can choose to listen or read or both. I invite you to make yourself comfortable, in whatever way that means for you – sitting with eyes closed, taking a walk, or whatever feels alright. Feel free to pause, stop, return.*

Breathe.

Breathe in through your nose for 3... 2... 3

and out through your mouth for 4...2...3...4

in 2, 3

out 2, 3, 4

in 2, 3

out 2, 3, 4

feel the cold prickles of the air as it goes – how deep can you feel it inside?

Concentrate.

Can you feel it now elsewhere?

feel its movement?

Think through the feeling of its movement.

(breathe)

breathe out.

As you take your breaths, give honor to what is in them, the particles, the air that circulates between, through; moving

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inside and outside of our bodies. Touching crevices, exchanging, oxifying, carrying into and out and into another again.

Feel the warmth that is present in the cool.

What do you consider a body? (bodily)<sup>1</sup>

An object? (discipline)<sup>2</sup>

How do we decide that we decide a certain visuality,<sup>3</sup> arrangement of prioritized ideas<sup>4</sup> of closeness, kin, intimacy decide what is tangible, manipulatable, technological, logical, natural, affect(ive/ing),

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<sup>1</sup> Frantz Fanon declares in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), and Arun Saldanha later discusses (2006), in the operations of racialization of Black people through/by whiteness and white people "I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects" (p. 82). He continues later: "In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty" (ibid.). Judith Butler, in many texts, speaks of the ways in which bodies come to (be) matter, for instance: "the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities" (1988, original emphasis, p. 521). Donna Haraway, in "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985) questions why the body should end at the skin. Often this is interpreted to think about mechanical technologies, like computers, phones, implants, etc. extending what is understood as the human body as, for instance, cyborg. However, this can also be read to include teleological technologies, like social constructs, histories, communities, and many other bodies that are often considered immaterial and thus not (the) matter.

<sup>2</sup> Haraway frequently discusses the creation of boundaries and "what counts as an object," and how that constructs narratives – or what kinds of narratives seem possible – like hegemonic histories and understandings. See, for instance, Haraway, 1988. See also Karen Barad's discussions of objects and apparatuses (1998).

<sup>3</sup> Barad addresses optics, explaining how particular hierarchies of visuality produce biases in hegemonic understandings of truth and matter (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Povinelli describes ontology as "an arrangement of existents at/on/in the plane of existence. We are, in other words, grappling with a meta-existence-existence dynamic. Entities and their arrangements are immanent to the plane of existence. But the plane of existence is also immanent in relation to itself and the entities it produces. In other words, *the* plane of existence is not *one* plane of existence. It is always more than one, even as it is becoming hegemonic or maintaining its hegemony. Why? The plane of existence is the given order of existents-as-arrangement. But every arrangement installs its own possible derangements and rearrangements" (2014, "Geontologies").

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intuitive, alive, agential, singular<sup>5</sup>; the thing that can be inside or outside the other thing that has an inside and outside?<sup>6</sup>

Feel the parts of what you deem your body,

What seems to act as your body, at their boundaries? Feel the  
static, the cold, the warmth  
Notice how it feels to feel this space amongst spaces as  
boundary.

Listen to the ways and vibrations and my spit echo in the  
sounds.

Can you feel the movement of the matter?  
Colliding, taking shapes, diffracting, marking, denting,  
pushing.

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<sup>5</sup> See Saldanha's discussion of slime molds and emergence (2006), which thinks through the slipperiness of collectivity and singularity using the structure of slime molds.

<sup>6</sup> Barad explains "What often appears as separate entities (and separate sets of concerns) with sharp edges does not actually entail a relation of absolute exteriority at all... the relation of the social and the scientific is a relation of 'exteriority within.' This is not a static relation but a doing – an enactment of boundaries – that always entails constitutive exclusions and therefore requisite questions of accountability" (2003, p. 803). Sara Ahmed offers an affective understanding of what creates the skins and boundaries of objects explaining that "emotions work to create the very distinction between the inside and the outside" (2004, p. 28). Or, Ahmed explains, "emotions play a crucial role in the 'surfacing' of individual and collective bodies... they define the contours of the multiple worlds that are inhabited by different subjects" (ibid., p. 25), "they 'affect' the very distinction of inside and outside in the first place" (ibid., p. 29). Additionally, Butler, in *Bodies that Matter*, proposes "a notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a *process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce its effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (1993, original emphasis, p. 9), and how bodies that do not meet the considered norm become not understood as bodies, or not materialized, and then are deemed to serve as the outside of (the deemed) bodies (pp. 15-16). This could be read to mean that the consideration of some as non-normative humans or outside the 'standard' of human (those not meeting a Western centered hierarchy of white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, etc.) creates an Other, and propositionally also to mean bodies not of linear spatial and temporal closeness, for instance social identities: which are often not considered bodies with multiple parts and people making them up, but as the immaterial social stuff between and moving bodies.

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Focus; center on something you consider a material part of what you understand as your body most readily.

Do you feel something now? What does it feel like if you do?

Can you locate the atoms?

The pain?

The memories?

The melancholy?

How many things shift there? Can you pinpoint it? Does it move? fluctuate?

Can you feel the spaces between what is in movement or settled?

And if between and felt,

how between?

Between what?

Feel the meeting space. Feel "yourself" solidify and diffuse in tandem; inextricably as processes of each other.<sup>7</sup>

Put your hand or a felt body part, if you can, on an "object."

Multiplicities of particles have changed form, exchanged, electrons jumped in the process.

Can you feel the space between *it* and the object?

What are these felt spaces between?

focus.

Shift again on a part inside of your felt body that you do not usually seem to feel unless experiencing pain.<sup>8</sup>

Concentrate. Center. Bring its feeling primary.

Know you feel it even as it is not pain.

it is connected and moving. It is part.

extend out.

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<sup>7</sup> Barad (1998) discusses Niels Bohr's scientific and philosophical conceptions of object and apparatus and how cuts, or the decisions that determine the boundaries of an object are conditional to the apparatus within which a measurement occurs. Meaning, what counts as an object or force, and also what then is outside or not the object or force, depends on conditions, what is to be measured or understood, and the formulation of objectivity.

<sup>8</sup> See Ahmed's (2004) discussion on the legacy of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic understandings of pain and how the flowing of feelings that come to be understood as pain establish surfaces.

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feel your body's boundaries, their connections, extensions.  
Where do you hold tension? Weight? Sediment?

Feel outside your body.

The edges.

Know they are real even if not as pain.

bring its feeling primary.

the body as a viscous<sup>9</sup> and congealed gathering of  
identities, histories, particles, water, flesh, electrons  
operating in what is decided and enacted as a political  
body or field or something-as-such; as you.<sup>10</sup>

settle.

What bodies shift through, solidifying, congeal, concentrate in  
your body? your presence?<sup>11</sup>  
Feel your extended body.

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<sup>9</sup> Saldanha explains, "The spatiality of race is not one of grids or self/other dialectics, but one of viscosity, bodies gradually becoming sticky and clustering into aggregates" (2006, p. 10), and later continues "Neither perfectly fluid nor solid, the viscous invokes surface tension and resistance to perturbation and mixing. Viscosity means that the physical characteristics of a substance explain its unique movements. There are local and temporary thickenings of interacting bodies, which then collectively become sticky, capable of capturing more bodies like them: an emergent slime mold. Under certain circumstances, the collectivity dissolves, the constituent bodies flowing freely again. The world is an immense mass of viscosities, becoming thicker here, and thinner there" (ibid., p. 18).

<sup>10</sup> I have previously (2017) written more extensively on this notion of the body as a political gathering, and how this might help to be accountable with taking up different kinds of space in different situations.

<sup>11</sup> "Materialization is an iteratively intra-active process whereby material-discursive bodies are sedimented out of the intra-action of multiple material-discursive apparatuses through which these phenomena (bodies) become intelligible" (Barad, 1998, p. 108). And, "The organization of social and bodily space creates a border that is transformed into an object, [which happens also] as an effect of... intensification of feeling... reform[ing] social space through reforming the apartness... Or, to be more precise, the skin comes to be felt as a border through reading the impression of one surface upon another as a form of negation" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 33).

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What do you bring in the room when you enter?

Feel the social bodies that settle in you. Sediment. that extend from your physicalized form.

Your identities, social categories, experiences, memories. Feel how they are ingrained in, inextricable from the body-as-named.<sup>12</sup>

Feel how they extend from the body-as-named.<sup>13</sup>

Notice the space in the room. The space taken up when you move through space.<sup>14</sup> What you bring. What is kin. What

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmed explains how emotions are “what attaches us, what connects us to this or that place, or to this or that other, such that we cannot stay removed from this other, is also what moves us, or what affects us such that we are no longer in the same place. Hence movement does not cut the body off from the ‘where’ of its inhabitation, but connects bodies to other bodies... The relationship between movement and attachment is contingent, and this suggests that movement may affect different others differently” (2004, p. 27).

<sup>13</sup> Saldanha’s speculative mapping helps to think how these kinds of extended bodies may be recognized: “What conventional sociological and geographical conceptions of ‘class’, ‘company’, and ‘racism’ lack is a sense of how these are glued together by bodies – bodies which could theoretically all be mapped by mobile global positioning systems. Imagine time-geography not for one body, but for thousands simultaneously, and in real time. Then imagine all these trajectories colored, with gross simplification, according to the affects fuelling them: famine, pleasure, fear, heroism. The trajectories rapidly become entangled, creating local concentrations of hue, hazy and dynamic like clouds. The impossibility of representing planetary complexity like this should not keep us from theorizing what exactly makes it impossible: simultaneous mass embodiment” (2010, pp. 2420-2421).

<sup>14</sup> A common phrase in many discussions regarding activist and pedagogical organizing, especially organizing in ways that do not replicate oppressive patterns, is that people relatively privileged in a group tend to “take up a lot of space,” often not consciously recognizing that they/we are doing so or that we/they are assuming an entitlement to do so. For instance, this could be masculine (whatever that means) people in mixed discussion, those whose native language is being used in a conversation with those who may be less confident in the language being used, those that experience white privilege, etc. This space can be “physical,” as in spreading arms and legs over multiple chairs or couch space, though this space is most often referred to as space in conversation, so speaking first and/or for long periods of time, continuing to pull the center of conversation to the topics they are most interested in or which affect them in ways they feel as most directly, etc. Saldanha asks after “a concept of space in which fixity can emerge from flux under



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How much do you spread? Bulge with entitled bodies like muscles flexed, aggravated, tense?  
Spreading and pushing that of others.

When do you shrink, solidify in singularity; get stepped on, pushed?<sup>17</sup>

1. Think of the spreads that enact the structures and spatializations of oppression. Think of the ways you can control your spreads like these.<sup>18</sup> What can you do to shrink back? Where *does* and also *where* should that indicate something may be *not your place*?
2. Think of a part of you often structurally pushed out, made to feel crowded, out of place<sup>19</sup>, pushed away.

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<sup>17</sup> Ahmed, in discussing white nationalist rhetorics, explains how "hate works to create the very outline of different figures, which aligns those figures together" setting boundaries of body/ies (social, human, white, etc.) and in that also deciding a hierarchical "purity" of whiteness to certain bodies and threshold of "violation" or "threat" (2004, p. 26). She goes further to say "feelings make 'the collective' appear as if it were a body in the first place" (ibid., p. 27), justifying and naturalizing these determined thresholds. She also explores further "impressions left by bodily others" (ibid.), which she later phrases, like Barad, as marks left on bodies. In this case, of course, the threshold and violation may not only be formed via hierarchical racial hatred, nor is the violation only of some claimed purity and/or whiteness. Rather, the setting of thresholds – like that claiming the purity of whiteness – can already push, step on, and violate differentialities and what becomes Othered through their imposing determination. For instance using this example, the racial schema described assigns purity – and thus the possibility for alleged violation – to the deemed white bodies, while simultaneously imagining differing (meaning not-white) bodies to not be capable of those things like purity and violation; this itself is a cutting, shrinking violation.

<sup>18</sup> Many anti-oppressive facilitation practices and alternative pedagogies include concrete practices that are designed to help. For example, see the guides and practices provided by AORTA (online).

<sup>19</sup> Katherine McKittrick discusses (Western colonial) Man's geography and conceptions of (un)habitability, space and place, and how the "place of black women is deemed unrecognizable because their ontological existence is both denied and deniable as a result of regimes of colonialism, racism-sexism, transatlantic slavery, European intellectual systems, patriarchy, white femininity, and white feminism" and questions "present geographic organization" (2006, p. 133) in order to respatialize.

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Think of a time when that part was embellished, treasured, given space and nourished – when it expanded and blended and intra-acted in the place.<sup>20</sup>

What made that possible? What were the conditions? The arrangements?

What bodies were felt as immediately present – and which not?

Settle.

Feel the expanded and diffuse of your body. the pulses, closenesses, movements, intimacies, settlings, changes, the solidities, expanses

feel it congeal and solidify; feel it entangled; tie elsewhere not close

When you're ready, acclimate again in the room  
feel your body felt as body-as-named  
breathe in and out

move parts, roll shoulders, open lips, assess space.

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<sup>20</sup> Audre Lorde explains, "My fullest concentration of energy is available to me only when I integrate all the parts of who I am, openly, allowing power from particular sources of my living to flow back and forth freely through all my different selves, without the restrictions of externally imposed definition. Only then can I bring myself and my energies as a whole to the service of those struggles which I embrace as part of my living" (1984, pp. 120-121).

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