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# “You deciphered me and now I am plain to read”: How the Body Is a Book<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Is the body a book? Drawing on both bibliographic studies and theories of subjectivity, this paper argues that the body *is* a book by considering three technologies of book production: writing, reading, and circulation. I argue that the body is written through a reiterative process of reading and circulation, and that all three technologies are mutually constitutive. The body thus becomes a new mode of knowledge production that information science must consider.

## INTRODUCTION

Consider a body. Consider a body next to you, or a body walking toward you, passing you on a crowded street. Consider your own body, or mine. Any body will do. Is the body a female body, a male body? Is it an old body, an able body, a white body, or a queer body? Is it a happy body or an enraged body? A somebody? Perhaps a nobody? How do you know these things? By sight, or smell, or sound? Or is it just a general feeling you have about a body?—the Author

Conceived in 2002, *Somatica* is a performance-based art project in which I am seeking to have my physical body cataloged as a book in a library's collections. The project came about as a result of my time working at the Newberry Library in Chicago, as well as my own experience of “being read” as a queer body. Since then, I have come across artists, writers, and activists, all of whom have produced work that engage the relationship between bodies and books. For instance, in 2003, writer Shelley Jackson launched “Skin,” a story published by tattoo, one word at a time, on the bodies of 2,095 volunteers. As of April 20, 2010, 553 words out of 1,445 sent to volunteers had been inscribed onto individual bodies (Jackson, 2010). In

addition, the Human Library set up a mobile library at the Santa Monica Public Library in 2008. The Human Library (<http://humanlibrary.org>) bills itself as “a positive framework for conversations that can challenge stereotypes and prejudices through dialogue” by setting up mobile libraries as spaces for interaction where “real people are on loan to readers” at local libraries. Jackson’s “Skin” (2010) raises questions about the nature of publishing and the way that stories can connect bodies. The Human Library project also takes up the role of stories, especially oral histories, in talking across difference. While both projects use the body as a means for storytelling, both have yet to fully articulate that such stories are possible, because the body is itself a book. *Somatica*, in conversation with both “Skin” and the Human Library project, asks a number of questions about the body as book. My primary questions, however, in conceptualizing this project, are: How does one write a body? Or read a body? Must a body be in circulation to be a book?

While I will not be addressing the specifics of *Somatica* as an art piece in this paper, I will answer these three questions by placing theories of subject formation into dialogue with *bibliography*, loosely defined as the study of books as physical and cultural objects. Book history and bibliography have made use of structuralist and poststructuralist scholarship, and scholars working in both methodologies have employed the metaphor of the body as book, or the body as a surface on which to write. Neither, however, has gone so far as to state that the body *is* a book. Therefore I will provide a brief theoretical framework for *Somatica* in order to argue that the body is, in fact, a book by considering three key technologies of book production that my primary questions point to: How the body is written. And once written, how the body circulates. Finally, while in circulation, how the body is read.<sup>2</sup>

Traditionally a repository for books, the library has always already been concerned with bodies in so far that catalogers and public-services librarians are interested in getting books and information into the hands of the bodies that enter through a library’s doors—for instance, libraries already “catalog” bodies in patron/user databases.<sup>3</sup> *Somatica* seeks to shift the body from this patron/user catalog to the book catalog and thus encourage libraries and librarians to consider not only bodies as receivers of knowledge but also as sites of information. As such, including a body in a library’s collections pushes the boundaries of what counts as knowledge. Understanding how the body can be read, written, and circulated as a book sheds light specifically on how other forms of gendered or sexualized knowledge are produced. Attention to the reading, writing, and circulating of the body enables us to more fully understand how bodies are written into being and resist “cultural inscriptions of meaning that underlie the politics of class, race, gender, and age” (Patterson & Corning, 1997, p. 9), as well as sexuality, thereby proliferating *new* cultural inscriptions

that open up space for a more nuanced understanding of the role that information science plays in knowledge production and dissemination.

### DEFINING THE BOOK, DEFINING THE BODY

It may be useful at this point to further explore what it is we mean by a “book,” or a “body,” for that matter. Traditionally, we tend to think of a book as a block, or body, of text bound between two boards—a codex. According to the online version of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (n.d.), a *text* is comprised of “the wording of anything written or printed” (n.p.). In order to expand the meaning of *text* beyond manuscript and print forms, book historian and bibliographer D. F. McKenzie (2003) articulates an etymological history of *text* by returning to the Latin *texere*, meaning “to weave,” arguing that in its original meaning, *text* does not refer to any one specific material as such, but more specifically to “the web or texture of the materials,” and thus “the interlacing or entwining of any kind of material.” McKenzie argues further that “it is only by virtue of a metaphoric shift . . . that the verb ‘to weave’ serves for the verb ‘to write,’ that the web of words becomes a text” (p. 29).

Both “to weave” and “to write” articulate processes of material construction that are not “peculiar to any one substance or any one form,” and thus, “the idea that texts are written record on parchment or paper derives only from the secondary and metaphoric sense that the writing of words is like the weaving of threads” (pp. 29–30). Under this definition, texts appear to be primarily concerned with words, as well as the weaving together of words. Rhetoricians and media scholars, however, have broadened our understanding of what counts as a text by shifting an emphasis on *words* to an emphasis on *recorded forms* more broadly speaking, such as photographs, audio recordings, online social media like Tumblr and Twitter, and even the body.<sup>4</sup> Within the scope of bibliography, McKenzie himself has broadened his understanding of what constitutes a text and thus considers all “recorded” forms texts, including “verbal, visual, oral, and numeric data, in the form of maps, prints, and music, of archives of recorded sound, of films, videos, and any computer-stored information, everything in fact from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography” (p. 29). Thus not all texts exist only as words on a page, but also exist as any artifact that conveys meaning, including the body.

Having just shown how the body is a text, we must take the body further and argue that the body is a book. For Dane (2012, p. 8), a *book* “is always something that exists in immediate and direct relation to a material book-copy,” and a *book-copy* is “always a material object that exists in time and space and carries with it its own unique history.” From a somewhat problematic essentialist position, *book* “refers to some abstract concept that allows us to speak of a number of book-copies as a unit, as essentially identical.” Put another way, a *book* is an abstract text, and a *book-copy*

is the material manifestation of that abstract text. If we accept (for the sake of argument) this essentialist position, bodies with penises are book-copies of the abstract book “male” or “man,” and bodies with vulvas are book-copies of the abstract book “female” or “woman.” In this way, subjectivity could be said to exist within Dane’s understanding of a book, and the material embodiment of subjectivity is constituted by the book-copy. Dane also points out that “any individual book-copy is subject to rebinding throughout its life” (p. 146), and that “books are thought to transcend their bindings” (p. 150). Similarly, because subjectivity is abstract, it can therefore transcend the binding of a corporeal body, which changes over one’s lifetime whether by means of natural aging or medical intervention.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the book and the body share a history of conceptualization in that we often use bodied terms for books (spine, footnote, appendix) and book metaphors to talk about the body (for example, they are an *open book*; it is *written* all over his face). By arguing that the body is in fact a book, I aim to reanimate, or at least “flesh out,” this shared history of interconceptualization.

In addition to Dane’s definition, the *OED* (n.d.) defines *book* as a “written composition long enough to fill one or more such volumes” (n.p.). The book therefore is the abstract meaning of the writing, and not necessarily the material written or printed page. Such a definition opens up space to reconsider what counts as a book. Why not a body? In *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies*, Michel Serres (1985) uses the metaphor of the body as a surface on which to print, impress, write, or tattoo. According to him, skin “is identical to the canvas” (p. 32). With this metaphor, Serres invokes both the woven nature of the canvas and the woven nature of words in order to articulate the body as not only a surface on which to write, but also as a text always already written. Given that the *OED*’s (n.d.) first entry regarding the verb *to write*, albeit obsolete, indicates that it means to “score, outline, draw the figure (of something); to incise” (n.p.), our understanding then of the body as a book must consider how the body is always already written into being.

## WRITING BODIES

The body’s surface is a woven tapestry, much like “tunics, curtains, scarves, leaves, bathrobes [that] are printed like books, using strong pressure. The skin, a hard and soft wax, receives these variable pressures according to the strength of things and the tenderness of the area” (Serres, 1985, p. 37). A distinction, however, must be made between writing *on* the body and the writing *of* a body, although both are equally important for the construction of the body as a book. Like parchment (calfskin, sheepskin, goatskin) or vellum (calfskin), human skin has a history of being marked on, whether permanent or not, and is receptive to various modes of impression. As a photosensitive surface, the skin responds to light and can be

manipulated to create photographic images on its surface. Tattooing has long been a mode for both adorning bodies, preserving cultural histories, and marking bodies in such a way that they are written into specific social positions.

Macalister (1956) points out that an eleventh-century history of Ireland, *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, describes tattooing as a mode of inscribing history on the body: "It is written upon their knees and thighs and palms, so that it is corrected in the hands of the sages and righteous men and men of learning and historians" (p. 225). MacQuarrie (2000) reads this passage as a metaphor of potential cultural preservation by way of combining "the oral explanation of transmission" with the literary act of recording ancient tales of Ireland in writing, stating that "the account of the saints absorbing and incorporating the oral traditions which are passed down to them is conflated with the literal inscribing of the story on vellum, and the result is an image of the saint as book and the saintly skin as manuscript" (pp. 40–41). The end result of this reading is an image of the saints being inscribed with the history of Ireland, and then, postmortem, their skins are cut away and bound together, each saint embodying a bound folio of vellum manuscripts, "the whole story being imprinted as a text in the minds of and on the bodies of the saints" (p. 41). Serres (1985), along with cultural theorists like Ahmed (2004) and historians, including MacQuarrie (2000) and Carruthers (1997), has described the body as a surface on which to write. In each of these authors' configurations, the body appears passive, waiting to be written on by others external to that body—although Carruthers's articulation of memory and memorization is perhaps a more active articulating of writing onto oneself. In the many articulations of the ways in which we write *on* the body, scholars have tended to gloss over the fact that the body "is itself a construction" (Butler, 1999, pp. 12–13); as such, the body is not merely written *on*, but is written *into being*.

The body is styled or written into being in that "the very contours of 'the body' are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence" (p. 166), or what Foucault (1994, p. 173) calls "marks of similitude," which inscribe bodies into positions of legibility or illegibility. The body, for Foucault, is a location of inscription in that it is an inscribed surface of events and totally imprinted by history (1977, p. 148), or perhaps as history. In other words, it is a repeated history of "acts, gestures, and desire" that write an "internal core or substance" both into and on the surface of the body. Such writings are "manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler, 1999, p. 173). Furthermore, Butler suggests that gendered bodies are "styles of the flesh," and that these are "never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and those histories condition and limit the possibilities" (p. 177). An antiquated meaning of the word *style*, according to the *OED* (n.d.), refers to the historical practice of marking books in that, as a noun,

it is “an instrument . . . for incising letters” (n.p.). We can then perhaps reread Butler (1999, p. 172) as arguing that gendered bodies are the result of a linguistic incising of the flesh. The body as a book thus presents “the corporeal stylization [incising] of gender” as a corporeal “typography” that reproduces a text, while also stylistically influencing how that specific text is to be read for meaning.

While I will address typography and the act of reading bodies later in this paper, it is important to note that the subtleties of typography offer the potential for misreading and therefore resignifying a book’s meaning, or for reinscribing a book’s already established meaning. For instance, a “feminine” typography (such as women’s clothing) used to inscribe a “masculine” book-copy (a male body) with meaning runs the risk of being read as a transgression against an already inscribed social norm, thus writing the body as stigmatized (by way of a material or linguistic stigmata on the body), or offers a potential for rewriting already inscribed social norms. It is precisely the cultural styles or typographies through which the body is inscribed that the body is materialized or called into being as a book imbued with meaning, and thus, “without symbolic inscription, the body is negated” (Butler, 2011, p. 65). Symbolic inscription and typographic styling occur within the publication process.

Although the publication of books is perhaps more appropriately addressed within the framework of circulating bodies, publication does play an important role in how bodies are written and come into being. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) begins to articulate a history of “the great book of Man-the-machine” (p. 136). In the social publishing of bodies or “man-tomes,” discipline operates in two ways. First, for Foucault, the book “is formed [by] a policy of coercions that act upon the body [of text], a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior.” The book then enters the publishing house, or what he calls “a machinery of power,” that prepares the book-copy for circulation in society by “explor[ing] it, break[ing] it down, and rearrang[ing] it” (p. 138). These coercions act as revisions of the body/book-copy; thus the illegible body/book-copy becomes a text that is read and revised into submission and social legibility. Inscribed bodies and printed books are the products of complex social and technological processes; many systems of power, machines, materials, and ideologies must collaborate for the body to be written. How all these various components work together ultimately affects the finished product in many ways. The gendered and sexualized identity (and identifiability) of bodies can be understood as a result of these intricate processes of inscription.

The book, or story, of the body does not end with its creation of a book-copy. How bodies are used, by whom, and in what circumstances provide books and bodies with deeper meanings and signification (Johns, 2003, p. 60). In order to render users, uses, and the various relevant circum-

stances, we must first understand how bodies are circulated and how such circulation impacts both the writing and reading of bodies.

### CIRCULATING BODIES

In “The Book of Nature and the Nature of the Book,” Johns argues that the book as we know it is the result of print, and thus writing has become saturated in culture to the point that the reliability of the printed word is taken for granted as matter of fact: “The very identity of print itself is *made*. It came to be how we now experience it only by virtue of hard work, exercised over generations and across nations” (p. 60; emphasis in original). As such, the construction of print identity is “is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects. Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms” (Butler, 2011, p. xix). Thus the obscurity of such labor processes reveals how saturated the identity of print has become through a process of reiteration, and how it is “dedicated to effacing its own traces, and necessarily so: only if such efforts disappeared [can] printing gain the air of intrinsic reliability on which its cultural and commercial success [can] be built” (Johns, 2003, p. 60). Bibliographic studies can help us retrace how circulation has constructed not only print identity but also the body itself.

As a “discipline that studies texts as recorded forms, and the processes of their transmission, including their production and reception” (McKenzie, 2003, p. 29), bibliography requires us to take into consideration the circulation of book-copies in order to bring to the fore a history of the body as a book-copy, and thus a book, that has been obscured through a process of reiteration. Darnton (2003) argues that all texts, primarily printed books (that is, book-copies), pass through what he calls “a communications circuit” wherein the text travels “from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader. The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition” (p. 11).

Within this communications circuit, a significant component of print identity (and part of its appeal) is its “perceived fixity” in that the same book-copy (in theory) can be printed repeatedly, without mistakes—the book-copy is itself reiterative as a result of the printing process. (For more on print’s perceived fixity, see Ong [2003].) The writing of the body is a reiterative process of inscription operating on a similar communications circuit that creates the appearance of fixed cultural norms. While Darnton’s (2003) “circuit” is useful for mapping the circulation of books/book-copies with regard to the body as book, it might be helpful to add another dimension to this model and think of the circuit as a multidimensional loop of reiteration—or more accurately a coil, akin to Foucault’s

(1990, p. 45) “perpetual spirals of power and pleasure.” The “circular incitements” of Foucault’s spiral are perhaps more useful in understanding the circulation of the book, specifically because reading and writing are ongoing acts of power and pleasure that have mutually constitutive potential. Such power and pleasure operate in a “social space created by [a] reflexive circulation of discourse” (Warner, 2002, p. 90).

Written bodies circulate in public. As books, bodies circulate norms that then act discursively by impressing or imprinting cultural norms on others, and thus having been impressed on, the public then reiterates those norms through recirculation. The conventions of repetition as the imprinting of norms on the minds and bodies of the public that are circulated and reinscribed on others is concealed by the process of circulation itself, and thus “repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony” (Butler, 1999, p. 177). It should be noted that the *reading* of circulating bodies by the public allows for those norms to be reinscribed on both the psyche and body of the reader. I will return to the question of how we read bodies in the following section.

By calling attention to the process in which bodies circulate in and out of the public, we can begin to see how the machinery of power is decentralized and dispersed or saturated across the public itself, which is to say that circulation is both the machine *and* process of reiteration. Furthermore, within Darnton’s (2003) circulation circuit, the reader *appears* to complete the circuit because he “influences the author both before and after the act of composition” (p. 11). By remapping Darnton’s circuit as a perpetual spiral, we can better expose how the fixity of both printed matter and the body is imagined; that is to say, we can see how “there is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (Butler, 2011, p. xviii). The printed body moves in and out of the public, imprinting and being imprinted on by others and creating loops and feedbacks that make minor and often subtle adjustments to both the book and the book-copy; therefore, both are never as stable or fixed as they appear to be.

Within the instability of printing and reiterative inscription—as a result of circulation—the writing of new bodies becomes a possibility. Such spaces for possibility are the result of reading bodies that circulate, which I will discuss below. Before we can address reading, we must have a reader; as Butler (2004, p. 1) has argued: “One is always ‘doing’ with or for another.” Books/book-copies are produced not necessarily for a specific, individual reader but for a public—and not just any public, but as Warner (2002, p. 66) contends, “the kind of public that comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation.” In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner argues that the public is “an ongoing space of encounter for discourse” (p. 90); furthermore, “publics are among the conditions of textuality” in that the circulation of bodies in public creates the condition for writing and rewrit-

ing bodies of text. As a result, publics are, in essence, *intertextual* because they provide “frameworks for understanding texts against an organized background of the circulation of other texts, all interwoven not just by citational references but by the incorporation of a reflexive circulatory field” (p. 16). Thus both bodies and publics come into being only in relation to the circulation of bodies (p. 66).

In addition, the public is “constituted through mere attention” (p. 87), which requires merely “coming into range” (p. 88) of a body, which then propels the body into circulation among a public in that “anything that addresses a public is meant to undergo circulation” (p. 91). Furthermore, Warner argues that “a text, to have a public, must continue to circulate through time,” the success of which is “confirmed through an intertextual environment of citation and implication” (p. 97). Therefore a body walking down a crowded sidewalk is a text that addresses a public constituted of strangers. The body hails, or interpellates, these strangers into being a public “by virtue of being addressed” (p. 67) through mere proximity as a result of circulation, thus providing a potential encounter for discourse. Such encounters transmit discursive information across bodies, whether conscious or not, placing the body in a perpetual spiral of reflexive circulation and reiterative reinscription. As explained earlier, the instability of reiterative inscription provides a venue of possibility for writing and rewriting bodies and thus new publics. Such possibility is created within the act of reading.

### READING BODIES

In *The Transmission of Affect*, Brennan (2004) articulates reading as an act of discernment, “which begins with considered sensing” (p. 94). Discernment thus positions the reader as “an active and creative participant in the creation of meaning from the text” (Finkelstein & McCleery, 2003, p. 289). One way in which meaning is derived from a book-copy is through typography. Typography is itself expressive in that its “style and syntax determine the ways in which texts convey meanings” (Darnton, 2003, p. 21). In much the same way that our gestures, intonations, and sartorial choices are expressive and convey meaning, “the material forms of books, the non-verbal elements of the typographic notations within them, the very disposition of space itself, have an expressive function” (McKenzie, 2003, p. 31). In this way, both books and bodies have material—or more accurately, *corporeal* stylings. By understanding how book-copies “shape the response of readers” (Darnton, 2003, p. 21) and how “typographical style [is, in return,] influenced by the culture at large” (McKenzie, 2003, p. 32), we may broaden our understanding of how bodies are socially constructed, or written, as legible or illegible books. A given book’s typographical history, or corporeal styling, provides a history of the material object, including the body, as symbolic form. Such a history operates in two ways: “It can fal-

sify certain readings; and it can demonstrate new ones” (p. 34). Therefore reading is essential to the writing of bodies, and hence both processes are mutually constitutive of the body as book within the space of circulation. Within this gap between these polarities of falsified and new readings, the possibility for revising a book is fostered.

Iser (2003) argues that each book exists between two poles—the artistic and the aesthetic: “The artistic pole is the author’s text, and the aesthetic is the realization [of that text] accomplished by the reader. In view of this polarity, it is clear that the work itself cannot be identical with the text or with its actualization but must be situated somewhere between the two” (p. 291). Within this framework, the meaning of a book is written through a collaborative process between the material book-copy and its public in that the reader/public “receives” or reads the book by also composing it (pp. 291–292). The material book-copy is not passive, however, in that its typographic/corporeal styling influences, or as Iser argues, “controls,” its own reading and thus its own writing (p. 292). Although the influence or control of the reader is exercised *by* the material book-copy (by way of typographic styling), it is not *in* the book; instead, the symbolic text of the book exists in the space between the material book-copy and its public. In this way, a book’s symbolic meaning is constructed through a collaborative process between a material book-copy and its public.

Returning to an earlier example in my discussion on circulation, a body walking down a crowded sidewalk is a book-copy that addresses a public. The body influences how the public reads it through typographic and corporeal styling, such as gestures and clothing. The public receives the body of text/book merely by being called into existence by way of proximity to the passing body. On “receiving” the body by way of its passing by, the public’s reading of it—influenced by the body’s own corporeal styling or typography—composes the symbolic text/book, mapping it back onto the body/book-copy. The space between the material book-copy and the reader in which the book (symbolic text) is written by way of its own reading is the space of circulation. Thus the book vacillates between both poles in a perpetual motion of iteration and reiteration. As such, we must then consider the space between both artistic and aesthetic poles, as well as the space created between false readings and potentially new ones, as gaps that generate possibilities for resignification. Such gaps open generative spaces for new readings and writings to occur.

In *Excitable Speech*, Butler (1997) argues that “the possibility for a speech act to resignify a prior context depends, in part, upon the gap between the originating context or intention by which an utterance is animated and the effects it produces” (p. 14). The gap between both artistic and aesthetic poles, as well as the space created between false readings and potentially new ones, can be read as the gap between the “originating context” and the “effects it produces” that generate possibilities for resignification and,

thus, rewriting of the body. If we rethink the reiterative processes created within the circulatory space as an exchange or dialogue, we may clearly see where gaps arise. Within an exchange of information, the reader is required to supply missing information, to fill in the blanks with projection. Information takes on significance as a reference to what is missing from the exchange, thus it is “the implications and not the statements that give shape and weight to meaning” (Iser, 2003, p. 293). Furthermore, as Iser argues, when “the *unsaid* comes to life in the reader’s imagination, the *said* ‘expands’ to take on greater significance than might have been supposed,” and, thus, the book’s meaning is not “manifested on the printed page; it is a product arising out of the interaction between book-copy and reader” (p. 293; emphasis in original). Such interactions are constituted between the artistic and the aesthetic as the processes of iteration and reiteration within the space of circulation.

### CONCLUSION

In “The Power to Name: Representation in Library Catalogs,” Olson (2001) makes a strong case for rethinking the role of universal or standardized language in library cataloging. She recognizes that, like most institutions, libraries “reflect the marginalizations and exclusions of the society they serve” (p. 639), and that such universal language, or *controlled vocabulary*, in the catalog constructs “both a limited system for the representation of information and a universality/diversity binary,” hiding “exclusions under the guise of neutrality” (p. 640). As a result, users searching for subjects outside the mainstream may be “aided or impeded by the arrangement of the catalog and the physical locations of books” (p. 639).

In addition to positing a false binary between universality and diversity (which is itself hierarchical and not horizontal), controlled vocabulary, which is concerned with not only subjectivity but also materiality, implies that subjectivity, materiality, and physical location (in the library stacks) are all stable. Olson argues, however, that such controlled vocabulary not only is a reflection of social norms but also contributes to the construction of such norms and, therefore, participates in the oppression of marginalized subjectivities and materialities. *Somatica* therefore seeks to push against the limits of controlled vocabularies that would place the body outside of mainstream definitions of what counts as a book, as well as challenge what counts as the object of information science. Furthermore, *Somatica* seeks to assist libraries and librarians in “making the limits of our existing information systems more permeable.” Olson recognizes that making libraries systems more permeable is risky because by “making space for the other means that [librarians] must relinquish some of [their] power to the other—power of voice, construction, and definition.” Therefore librarians “must create holes in [their] structures through which the power can leak out” (p. 659). Including the body as a book in

library collections resists the static nature of controlled vocabularies and helps create the holes required for a more permeable system, because the body, by way of writing, reading, and circulation, proliferates gaps or holes that provide the possibility for the resignification and reinscription of new bodies.

The metaphor of the body as a book is perhaps one of the oldest in that it has been well-documented from classical to contemporary literature (MacQuarrie, 2000, p. 41). The relationship between books and bodies calls for a few metaphors that have themselves run the risk of becoming cliché: for example, an open book, read like a book, don't judge a book by its cover, cuddle up with a good book, read my lips, read my mind. When it comes to the book, the body, and the body as book, however, these metaphors work well because, as I have just argued, the body *is* a book that is written and read by way of its own circulation through a public. In her novel *Written on the Body*, Winterson (1994) famously quipped: "It's the clichés that cause the trouble" (p. 10). The use of the noun *cliché* in French prior to its early-nineteenth-century adoption into English, according to the *OED* (n.d.), was as a "name for a stereotype block . . . used to print form" (n.p.). The trouble with clichés therefore is perhaps not their repetitive nature, but that such repetitions are fixed. It is the reiterative process of circulation, however, that reads, writes, and rewrites the body into being. The body, along with gender and sexuality, is always in a process of becoming and, therefore, never static long enough to become a cliché. The reading, writing, and circulation of bodies allows us to understand the complicated relationships we have with our own bodies, as well as the encounters, impressions, and deciphering of signs in one another (Manguel, 1996, p. 169), thus creating new forms of knowledge that the field of information science must account for.

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## NOTES

1. The quote in this paper's title is from Winterson's *Written on the Body* (1994), p. 106.
2. Although this paper is primarily concerned with the writing, reading, and circulation of the body as a book, *Somatica* as a whole is concerned with all aspects of the book, including the *experience of being a book*—driven by my own queer experience of being read as both a legible and illegible body. Understanding not only the phenomenology of reading, but also the phenomenology of *being read* is important to understanding oneself as a book. We know, for instance, that phenomenologically, both the book and the body “disappear” when we are deeply engaged in reading, or “lost in a good book.” How is such a disappearance experienced between two bodies engaged in reading each other? What would it mean to get lost in an “other”? What might this experience tell us about gendered and sexualized knowledge, as well as subjectivity and identity? Therefore having first established how the body is a book through its own writing, reading, and circulation among a public, the next phase of *Somatica* will be to address the sentience and sensibility of books and what it means to live a book-life and engage with other book-lives.
3. Throughout this essay I use the virgule (“/”) in order to highlight how tightly imbricated two seemingly disparate concepts (for example, sex/gender, book/book-copy, book/body, and so on) happen to be. Such a move follows the work of Rubin (1975) in her groundbreaking article, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex.”
4. See Deluca (1999, 2002); Finnegan, Hope, & Olson (2008); Gray (2010); Hawhee (2009); and Jenkins (2006).
5. Dane (2012) points out that for books printed prior to the mid-nineteenth century, bindings were “modified by fashion, and those fashions have little to do with the contents of the book” (p. 146). Interestingly, at around the same time that a book's binding pointed toward a book's “subjectivity” in the mid-nineteenth century, there was a proliferation of anti-cross-dressing ordinances across the United States (Eskridge, 1999). While *correlation* does not equal *causation*, it would be useful to trace the history of how both book bindings and clothing are articulated as being indicative of a book's and/or a body's subjectivity—a project for which research is currently underway.

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