Introduction | An “Excursion”

The July 1920 issue of the Dial features a two-page piece called simply “The Excursion.” The piece, a story written by Kenneth Duva Burke, then twenty-three years old, is, according to Jack Selzer, one among a set of Burke’s stories that “gloss over hard distinctions between art and criticism in a way that anticipates the criticism-as-art in [his 1931 book] Counter-Statement and in much of Burke’s other work not only in the 1920s but after” (Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village 90). As Selzer claims, the fable/character sketch operates as a “relentless exploration of a characteristically modernist theme that deeply interested him [Burke] during the 1920s. . . : the place of the artist in society, the tension between artistic temperament and the commercial, technological, and material imperatives of the age” (90). All of these thematic currents indeed run through “The Excursion,” which features a despairing narrator plotting to destroy an anthill.

“Do Ants Talk?” A Language of Bodies

Yet to focus strictly on broad-stroke modernist themes risks missing two crucial points about the story: (1) that it connects thought with materiality and mobility, and (2) that it posits sensuousness as communication. Here is the opening paragraph: “Having nothing to do, and having searched in vain among the notes of a piano for something to think on, I started off on a walk, trusting that I might scent a scandal on the breeze, or see God’s toe peep through the sky. I passed a barber shop, a grocery store, a little Italian girl, a chicken coop, a road-house, an abandoned quarry, a field of nervous wheat. All this distance I had walked under God’s blue sky, and still without a thought. But at last, after trudging on for hours, I came upon a thought. Miles upon miles I had walked for a thought, and at last I came upon an ant hill” (27).

Noteworthy in this passage is the narrator’s quest for thought through movement—first in the rhythmic, tinkly notes of the piano, and then on a meandering walk. That the “swarming mass” (27) of an anthill finally counts as “a thought” for the questing narrator further underscores the importance of both movement
and material for thought. Moreover, the hill itself, presumably the product of the toiling ants, might be read as an instance of what political theorist Jane Bennett calls “thing power,” whereby matter pulses with energy, revealing a “world where the line between inert matter and vital energy, between animate, and inanimate, is permeable” (352). Such permeability in fact becomes the story’s focus when Burke’s narrator destroys the anthill and then erupts into a wailing meditation on death and suffering.

Just before the destructive act, however, as the narrator inspects the anthill, he observes two ants approaching and touching each other. Wondering what that could “mean,” he asks himself, “Do ants talk?” (28). “The Excursion,” then, not only sounds what would become signature modernist themes in modernist tones of despair, but the story also shows Burke working very early on with the force of matter, and concomitantly with a rhythmic, sensuous, material notion of communication and, indeed, of thought itself. Burke’s story, that is, presents an account of thought and communication that depends not on cognition—an extensive movement of mind—but on physical, responsive movement and external, sensuous connection, even in the instances of the character’s fingers on piano keys, of his feet on the ground, and of the ants on each other. However momentarily, Burke’s “Excursion” figures communication as haptic and bodily.

These notions of vitality, energy, and bodily communication would form the swarming mass of concepts that Burke never stopped contemplating, that he at times mangled, but out of which he ultimately fashioned the theories of language and rhetoric that would become signposts for rhetorical studies and, to a lesser degree but still significantly, literary studies. At the center of that swarming mass, as with both the ants and the narrator of “The Excursion,” is the thinking, sensing, moving body. Bodies, for Burke, enable critical reflection on meaning-making from an anti-Cartesian, noncognitive, nonrational perspective—that is, from a perspective that does not begin by privileging reason or conscious thought. It would be a mistake, however, to believe (as I did when I began writing this book) that Burke moves to the body as reason’s binary other, the sole answer to a Cartesianism that privileges mind and reason. Instead a focus on the body as more than just the obverse of the mind can enable a productive theoretical move to the thought-work of rhythm, energy, material, and movement. Such a move to the body thereby complicates an easy separation between mind and body, body and culture, and, as this book will show, body and language. At its most broadly productive, a move to the body also engages the multiple scientific, musical, or religious perspectives that most carefully contemplate bodies, rhythms, and movements, none of which can or need be easily disentangled from sociocultural or economic forces, but all of which bear importantly on meaning making, language use, and, yes, thought itself. Such a move, that is, calls for transdisciplinarity.
Trans- or Inter-? Studies for the Twenty-first Century

Transdisciplinarity has become a focus of late in response to the rapid proliferation of disciplines, what French-Romanian particle physicist Basarab Nicolescu refers to in his *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity* as a “disciplinary big bang” (34). This proliferation has not been limited to the cluster of fields Nicolescu knows best—the physical sciences—but in, and importantly, across, the social sciences and humanities as well. According to feminist social scientists Irene Dölling and Sabine Hark, transdisciplinarity both functions “as an epistemological and methodological strategy” and reconfigures disciplines as “multiple interconnections shot through by cross-disciplinary pathways” (1195). At stake in transdisciplinarity are the limits of knowledge itself, and most transdisciplinary work simultaneously respects disciplinary knowledge and acknowledges the limitations of working within the framework of a single discipline.¹

What distinguishes transdisciplinarity from interdisciplinarity is its effort to suspend—however temporarily—one’s own disciplinary terms and values in favor of a broad, open, multilevel inquiry. As Nicolescu puts it, “interdisciplinarity overflows the disciplines, but its goal still remains within the framework of disciplinary research” (43). That is, interdisciplinarity is marked by disciplinary affinity—closely allied fields such as history and literary studies or gender studies and rhetorical studies sharing methods and cross-listing courses—whereas transdisciplinarity is marked by shared interest in a particular matter or problem but often draws together radically different approaches. The difference is a matter of sharing methodologies (something interdisciplinarity does quite well) versus broadening perspective, one of the main goals of transdisciplinarity. Such an effort requires a suspension of disbelief in the values of other fields, an intellectual leap of faith. As Dölling and Hark argue, transdisciplinarity calls for “continual reexamination of artificially drawn and contingent boundaries and that which they exclude” (1197). Too often a signal of disciplinary boundaries has to do with watchwords. When such words as *origin* or *biology* or even *biography* appear before well-trained critical theorists in literary, rhetorical, or cultural studies, those words are met with at best skeptical looks, at worst whistle-blowing dismissal. Often such suspicion owes to solid philosophical commitments, but such disciplinary dismissal also effectively polices boundaries and stultifies the expansion of perspectives.

Transdisciplinarity, Incongruity

From an early point in his career and however unwittingly, Kenneth Burke became something of a spokesperson for transdisciplinarity. This is largely because he never toed any disciplinary line but was interested instead in thinking as broadly as possible about language, meaning making, rhetoric, and, as this book
will show, bodies. In many ways twenty-first-century transdisciplinarity captures the spirit of Burkean inquiry, especially as manifest in Burke’s early critical method, which he called “perspective by incongruity.” At base, perspective by incongruity calls for balancing a particular interpretive perspective with another perspective that sees things differently—often radically so. Burke poses the question this way: “Out of all this overlapping, conflicting, and supplementing of interpretive frames, what arises as a totality? The only thing that all this seems to make for is a reinforcement of the interpretive attitude itself” (Permanence and Change [PC] 3e 118). These lines, written more than seventy years ago, may speak to our transdisciplinary moment, for if discipline is substituted for interpretive attitudes, Burke’s lines pose a crucial question about the limits of disciplinary knowledge: at what point do disciplines exhaust their perspectives and begin to exist simply as reinforcers of themselves? Such a question assumes a discipline that is insular, and thanks to decades of interdisciplinary work, insularity is fairly rare these days. And yet the basic divisions—sciences and the humanities—still more often than not hold firm.

Burke’s perspective by incongruity grows out of an attempt to “see around the edges of the orientation in which a . . . thinker lives” (PC 3e 117), and it involves changing what and how we study. Burke’s second book, Permanence and Change (1935), features a long meditation on perspective by incongruity during which Burke offers that perhaps “one should study one’s dog for his Napoleonic qualities, or observe mosquitoes for signs of wisdom to which we are forever closed. One should discuss sneezing in the terms heretofore reserved for the analysis of a brilliant invention, as if it were a creative act, a vast synthesis uniting in its simple self a multitude of prior factors” (3e 119–20). This passage hearkens back to the “thought” Burke’s excursive narrator happens upon at the foot of the anthill. Burke goes on to employ a “hypothetical” research problem: “Imagine, then, setting out to study mankind, with whose system of speech you are largely familiar. Imagine beginning your course of study precisely by depriving yourself of this familiarity, attempting to understand motives and purposes by avoiding as much as possible the clues handed you ready-made in the texture of the language itself. In this you will have deliberately discarded available data in the interests of a fresh point of view, the heuristic or perspective value of a planned incongruity” (3e 121).

Here we have one of the most distilled accounts of Burke’s own intellectual mission and its basic method. It is a method that learns through suspension, through a deliberate forgetting of what one already “knows.” This book therefore offers Burke’s planned incongruity, his deliberate forgetting, as a useful tactic, a transdisciplinary tactic, for approaching the body and new materialisms. Such deliberate forgetting is, I offer, crucial to a transdisciplinary moment. To flip over the tactic of deliberate forgetting would most likely reveal a kind of radical, obsessive openness. Such openness allowed Burke’s ruminative writings to radiate
multiply, as he puts it in his essay “The Philosophy of Literary Form” (PLF), “The main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that is there to use” (PLF 23). To use all that is there to use, to exhaust all available investigative resources, names exactly the spirit of transdisciplinarity this book finds in Burke’s work. As a result of his exhaustive, radiating, transdisciplinary approach, Burke was able to incorporate into his work unflinchingly and at times audaciously such seemingly opposed perspectives as mysticism, endocrinology, and constitutional medicine in order to take up repeatedly questions about bodies and language: What do we talk about when we talk about bodies? How is it that (as Cicero says) our bodies talk? How does what the body says alter how it sees and is seen? By considering in turn bodies stultified through mystical experience, illness, or anaesthesia; animated by adrenaline or ideas; poked and prodded by psychiatrists and physicians, Burke developed a transdisciplinary perspective on bodies and the fascinating and sometimes peculiar ways that clenching bodies, deformed bodies, recalcitrant bodies, or dancing bodies all sneak up on language.

Body Clusters

Lest culling a transdisciplinary perspective from Burke seem somehow anachronistic, I want to offer as a historical warrant Burke’s clustering approach, which is tropically indebted to synecdoche. He discusses this particular approach in his long 1941 essay “The Philosophy of Literary Form”: “It should be understandable by now why we consider synecdoche to be the basic process of representation, as approached from the standpoint of ‘equations’ or ‘clusters of what goes with what.’ To say that one can substitute part for whole, whole for part, container for thing contained, thing contained for the container, cause for effect, or effect for cause, is simply to say that both members of these pairs belong in the same associational cluster” (77).

Burke’s synecdochic, cluster approach to criticism writ large favors what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in Touching Feeling terms “the ambition of thinking other than dualistically” (1); it aims for something besides what Burke calls “polar otherness” (PLF 78). For Burke polar otherness names that which “unites things that are [deemed] opposite to one another” while “synecdochic otherness . . . unites things that are simply different from one another” (78). In terms of bodies a Burkean synecdochic approach would have us suspend the question “What distinguishes body from mind or language?” in favor of the question “What (else) do we talk about when we talk about bodies (or mind, or language)?” These days, a clustering of terms would be the best place to begin answering that question. When we talk about bodies, that is, we talk about sensation, touch, texture, affect, materiality, performativity, movement, gesture, habits, entrainment, biology, physiology, rhythm, and performance, for starters. Such clustering can—and likely will—persist.
That this conceptual clustering can persist suggests that the main focus of this book—bodies—is a question that has not yet been exhausted. Nowhere is the need for transdisciplinary perspectives more obvious than in a consideration of bodies and materiality. In this context the observations made by economist Manfred Max-Neef become salient. Max-Neef offers transdisciplinarity as “a different manner of seeing the world, more systemic and holistic” (14), and suggests that such an approach would be most usefully imagined around big, broad, thematic areas—his suggestion is water—rather than specific disciplines. Other such thematic areas might include food, animals, language, climate, and—if now it should come as no surprise—bodies. Kenneth Burke, I argue, offers a productive foray into a transdisciplinary perspective on bodies.

Transdisciplinarity is often especially useful when a particular framework gets stuck in the mud of its own binaries. The case in point of this book is that of body theory in the humanities and social sciences. Judith Butler’s work, along with an important set of feminist scholars (Joan Scott, Susan Bordo, Londa Schiebinger, and Elizabeth Grosz among them), combined with the increasing attention paid to Foucault in recent decades, created the conditions for what Fredric Jameson calls “the proliferation of theories of the body nowadays” (“The End” 713). Jameson ascribes this proliferation to what he characterizes as the “deeper tendency of the socioeconomic order”: a “reduction to the present,” or temporality’s end, which he claims happens when “experience” is rendered nominalistically, thereby evacuating history (712–13). On balance, according to Jameson, body theory produces “the valorization of the body and its experience as the only authentic form of materialism” (713). For the most part I find Jameson’s view of the recent turn to the body as a corollary to temporality’s end or a radical “reduction to the present” to be itself rather reductive, and it ignores the possibility of a body historiography, an approach to historical work that keeps its eyes trained on materiality.2

Furthermore, Jameson’s point about a broader tendency to nominalize—in the case of body theory, to organize research according to the noun body (and a problematically singular noun at that)—also tends toward holding bodies still and ignores those scholars who focus on moving bodies. Jameson casts the problem in this way: “The problem with the body as a positive slogan is that the body itself, as a unified entity, is . . . an empty totality that organizes the world without participating in it” (713). So when, for example, performance theorist Julia Walker invokes dance theorist Randy Martin to offer up the material performing body as a “kinetic force of political resistance” (171), she offers the body as nothing if not participatory and also, crucially, as mobile. In doing so Walker also aligns with cultural theorist Brian Massumi in his intimation that bodies both are and are not the problem.
The bind for body theorists is that bodies become a problem when they come to “stand in” for subject positions—what Jameson calls the tendency to nominalize. Such nominal positionality does little to shift the conversations (or change the subject, as it were). And what is more, such positioning undoes exactly what makes bodies bodies: as Massumi puts it in *Parables for the Virtual*, “the idea of positionality begins by subtracting movement from the picture” (3). Contemporary theory thus has a tendency to freeze bodies, to analyze them for their symbolic properties, thereby evacuating and ignoring their capacity to sense and to move through time.

Part of the problem, Massumi intimates, is our vocabulary for talking about bodies, and extrapolating from Jameson, we might add grammatical number to the list. Working with Burke’s body theories, I have, like Massumi, come up against the limits of humanistic approaches to the body, especially with the available categories of essentialism and constructivism. That the Burkean Robert Wess fingers the Burke of *Permanence and Change* as a biological essentialist is a case in point (*Kenneth Burke* 66). Burke’s engagement with bodies from a variety of disciplinary vantage points foregrounds the body as a vital, connective, mobile, and transformational force, a force that exceeds—even as it bends and bends with—discourse. And yet if we suspend our discipline-induced fear of essentializing, we might see things differently. Attention to Burke’s early theories of the body reveals what Massumi might call a “productivist” approach to the body, a term that refuses the usually available—and somewhat anemic—terms *constructivist* and *essentialist* and, as Massumi suggests, would emphasize interactivity, intensities, and emergence (12). Such an approach might need to go beyond the humanistic enterprise for other ways to discuss bodily movement and change in time. For Burke mystics, with their clairvoyance, their attempts to “see around the corner,” as he puts it in *Permanence and Change* (3e 222), model a kind of productivist approach. Mystical bodies, drugged bodies, hormonal bodies, bodies theorized through evolution or examined through 1920s constitutional morphology are about neither authenticity nor experience, they do not come into focus through a kind of myopia, and they do not make it easy to settle for the language of positionality. Instead, these bodies strain toward transformative capacity, what we might term affectability.

Burke, then, may be brought in line with contemporary body theories in a way that subtly refutes recent examinations of Burkean bodies. In other words, now that scholars such as Elizabeth A. Wilson, Teresa Brennan, Leslie Paul Thiele, William E. Connolly, Celeste M. Condit (“Materiality”), and Elizabeth Grosz (*Nick of Time*) have ventured into discourses of biology, neuroscience, and biological evolution, essentialism is no longer the name of the “gotcha” game, and as Jane Bennett helpfully suggests, social constitution is no longer the “punchline”
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(358). And they never were for Burke. A transdisciplinary approach to the question of bodies allows us to set aside—however temporarily—such disciplinary hang-ups in order to, as Wilson puts it, “generate more vibrant, biologically attuned accounts of the body” (14). A biological perspective cannot so easily be placed in reductivist, determinist, or even essentialist brackets, because biologists and their allied scientists—endocrinologists and even neurologists, as Brennan’s work helpfully demonstrates—track processes that bear closely on meaning making and communicative processes. As political theorist Leslie Paul Thiele argues, the emergence of fields such as neuroeconomics, neuropolitics, neuro-psychology, and neuroethics signals the possibility of fruitful cross-disciplinary alliances that offer “tantalizing glimpses of a more holistic approach to the human condition” (ix). In a similar spirit, rhetorical theorist Celeste M. Condit offers what she terms a “program of transilience” to help humanists and social scientists coalesce around questions of the relationships between biology and what Burke called “symbolicity” (How Should We Study the Symbolizing Animal? 10–11, 13). For Condit, Burke is front and center in these efforts. Such syncretic approaches, too, allow a consideration of the nonhuman condition of humans, in other words, the importance of things—“natural” as well as synthetic (Jane Bennett 347–350). At stake in the drawing together of multiple disciplinary perspectives is a thoroughgoing view of meaning making itself, and as theorist William Paulson sees it, scientific knowledge bears crucially on meaning: “Cultural anthropologists did well to assert that we humans live in a world of humanly created meanings, but we also live in a material world of terrain, weather, and bodies—of things that we have not made and that act in ways that impinge upon the cultural and symbolic orders through which they take on meaning for us. For a long time it may have seemed possible to keep these worlds fairly separate, and thus to divide our intellectual labors between natural and human sciences. No more” (101). Paulson, Bennett, Condit, and Thiele therefore all point out how Jameson is both right and decidedly wrong. He is right that it would be a problem to allow “the body” to stand in for individual, singular experience (or as Massumi puts it, to hold bodies still), but Jameson is wrong in accusing all work on bodies of doing so and even in deeming experience so easily dismissed—legions of phenomenologists would certainly protest. And yet as I have been suggesting, and as Burke along with a host of contemporary theorists in multiple fields suggest, when we talk about bodies, we are often talking about so much more. We are talking about affect and nature and language; about movement and pain and environment. As literary theorist Cary Wolfe has pointed out, Burke’s refusal to “condemn ‘biologism’ wholesale”’ makes him a more “socially responsible critic” in that he “neatly walks the tightrope between the natural and social realms in what he calls his ‘Metabiology’” (73). As Wolfe and scholars in ecocriticism show, we have skirted past the time when jettisoning terms such as biology
and nature is worthwhile or even desirable. This book serves as an extended instance of where—and how—the question of bodies has taken one thinker. As it happens, that thinker has always been figured as multiple himself (Rueckert, Encounters; Hawhee, “Burke on Drugs”).

This book, that is, offers a transdisciplinary excursion through Burke’s writings on, about, and through bodies. Such an excursion cannot solely take the form of close readings of Burke’s writings, but instead must move between his writings and all the discourses—scientific and otherwise—Burke turned to in order to navigate his thought about bodies. As such, aside from the explicit discussion of transdisciplinarity above, the remaining chapters in this book show Burke performing transdisciplinarity and consider inductively, by example, what such a view offers contemporary body theories. The book therefore comments beyond Burkean studies or even rhetorical and literary studies and shows, with Burke’s writings as a backdrop, the ways multiple discourses on the body in the twentieth century differently constitute bodies and, more pointedly, how language, meaning, and communication both emerge from and help constitute bodies. In doing so, the book also offers Burke as one of that century’s first rhetoricians of science, and by this I do not just mean someone who examined the rhetorical force of science, but someone who strategically and regularly engaged with that force and with scientific knowledge itself, always with an interest in how new sciences such as neurology, endocrinology, and morphology could inform his own consideration of rhetorical, symbolic processes.

But Burke was thinking about bodies long before he wandered into discourses of science and religion, so it makes sense to examine his earliest published writings—in this case his early-1920s foray into short fiction and his music criticism—where there is ample evidence that bodies (sick bodies, charged bodies, rhythmic bodies) served as important guides for Burke from the beginning. As chapter 1, “Bodies as Equipment for Moving (from Artist to Audience),” argues, Burke’s early musings on bodily matters guided him right into questions of rhetoric and communication for what would become his lifelong excursion. Chapter 2, “Burke’s Mystical Method,” examines the importance of mysticism for Burke’s transdisciplinary approach to bodies. From the Russian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff and his students’ mystical dance performances, Burke drew a respect for the transformational capacity of bodies. For Burke, Gurdjieff’s bodily mysticism joined nicely with William James’s intellectual mysticism, which was marked by a radical openness and what Burke calls meliorism. That meliorism, a conviction that things can be better, involved, as the chapter discusses, eschewing that which is “rationally finished”—gleaming polished conclusions—in favor of the muddy gunk of materiality.

And what could be more gunky than scientific experimentation? Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 show Burke incorporating into his theories of bodies and language
findings from four different domains of scientific (or in some cases pseudoscientific) knowledge—drug research, endocrinology, constitutional medicine, and a peculiar evolutionary theory of language called gesture-speech, which holds that the human capacity for language found its evolutionary beginnings in bodily gesture. With very few exceptions, these discourses have been ignored by scholars working on Burke, in part because they are wound so tightly with discourses such as psychoanalysis, discourses more familiar to scholars in the humanities and social sciences. Burke's more "sciency" passages frequently spill into his notoriously rambling footnotes or end up on the editing block in subsequent editions. And yet following these discourses out into the footnotes and beyond the chopping block nevertheless helps build a vital account of language and bodies edging closer together. That account is not wholly celebratory, but at times it serves to remind us why the terms essentialism and social construction took hold in the first place. Such is the case in Burke's engagement with constitutional medicine, which held that body measurements are sure indexes of psychiatric inclinations. Still, even in such a roundly dismissed science, Burke manages to cull, however imperfect, an account of bodily deviance as other than deviance.

Deviance, pain, and illness frequently crop up in talk of bodies, and Burke's contributions are no exception. Chapter 7, "Welcome to the Beauty Clinic," works in the mode of what I call "body biography" to examine Burke's return to bodily matters in the 1950s. During that decade bodies seeped into Burke's critical and fictional writings, despite his at-times resolute efforts to bracket the question of physicality while he labored over his "Symbolic of Motives," which was to be the third and final installment of the "motives" trilogy. When considered alongside his strained and pained published work from that decade, Burke's letters show that he grappled with his own aging, ailing body just as much as he did with the body in theory. His letters help document an emerging theory of body-thinking, which later becomes manifest in his cloacal criticism, criticism that focuses on the otherwise repulsive underbelly of humanity: excrement, vomit, pollution. This mode of criticism, puzzling to most Burke scholars, overtly resists what Burke calls the "Beauty Clinic," the tendency to clean ourselves up in thought and body, and to ignore offscourings. And yet for Burke the rotten stench of excrement and dirty bathwater is the basis of life.

Burke's cloacal criticism therefore clarifies Burke's ecocritical legacy, and this chapter works to show the inseparability of bodies and language, of bodies and ecology, of bodies and politics, of bodies and life. Burke's 1958 quasi-fictional essay "The Anaesthetic Revelation of Herone Liddell" dramatizes this turn to bodies and ecology as indispensable for a theory of language, the import of which makes isolating a theory of symbolic motives an empty, futile exercise.
My research for this book has shown me—much to my surprise—that an examination of Burke’s bodily theories cannot possibly be confined to a single monograph. I have therefore sacrificed exhaustiveness in favor of depth and have focused on the fields that bear most notably (or in some cases surprisingly) on rhetoric and language theory in the hopes that other scholars will augment accordingly. At times my treks through the various discourses Burke engages to think about bodies track closely with Burke’s own theoretical interventions, offering, for example, a somatic genealogy of dramatism, arguably Burke’s most widely known critical concept. At other times this book becomes immersed in biographical details, but only when there is a theoretical payoff, as with the method of “body biography” performed in the book’s final chapter. At still other times, Burke and his writings become more of a backdrop, a humanistic stage for drawing together scientific, social scientific, and humanistic ways of thinking about language, the body, and more. Given that Burke wrote for a solid seven decades during the twentieth century, the historical stage he provides is vast.

One point of this book, then, is that despite the dismissiveness of critics such as Jameson and Terry Eagleton, humanistic, cultural studies of the body are neither all that new nor newly passé (Eagleton, After Theory 2–3). Instead, they have formed a crucial cluster of concepts that helps us get beyond the distinctly Jamesonian “rational polish” of his 2003 intervention, thereby helping us see anew an impasse Jameson reached with Burke himself in the late 1970s in the pages of Critical Inquiry, an impasse that led Burke, once again (and once and for all), back to bodily matters. I will discuss that era in the conclusion, focusing primarily on a little-known review Burke wrote of the second edition of J. L. Austin’s monumental study of performative language, How to Do Things with Words.

In that review Burke uses Austin’s speech-act theory to elaborate dramatism vis-à-vis action and motion, the categories that Burke settles on to theorize language and bodies respectively. The conclusion, then, shows how accounts by thinkers such as Jameson, with their insistence on language as always and only an epistemological tool, pin themselves to rationality and ideology, eschewing materiality, attitudes, affect, rhythm, bodies, and movement—the stuff of life. As I hope this excursion through Burke’s most bodily theories will show, music and mysticism have as much to teach us about bodies as do medicine and morphology, and the links Burke finds to language are at times rather surprising. The task remains to learn to listen.