

**CALL FOR ABSTRACTS – Special issue of *Subjectivity*: The contemporary making and unmaking of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain***

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We would hereby like to invite you to submit an abstract to be considered for inclusion in a proposed special issue of the journal *Subjectivity*, entitled 'The contemporary making and unmaking of Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain*', to be co-edited by the above mentioned team of academics.

In 2015 it will be 30 years since the publication of Elaine Scarry's *The body in pain: The making and unmaking of the world*. Immediately recognised as a persuasive and original exploration of embodied experience (Goldsmith, 1985; Kolenda, 1988), this study was subsequently described as 'classic' (Zhang, 2014) and 'monumental' (Bourke, 2011). At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Edward Said (1999, cited in Douglass & Wilderson, 2013) stated, "There is no one even remotely like Elaine Scarry for the depth of originality of her thinking in the humanities today". Given such praise, in what ways has this text been taken up in the academy?

In the three decades since 1985 the ubiquitous turn to language in the social sciences has evolved into a turn to the body, a corporeal refocus that has involved, amongst other trajectories, preoccupations with both neural materiality and the more ethereal notion of affect. Throughout this period the influence of Scarry's thesis has been visible across multiple disciplines and topics, including black subjectivity (da Silva, 2012; Douglass & Wilderson, 2013), drama (Freeland, 2011; Thompson, 2006), history (Bourke, 2011), literary studies (Bernatchez, 2009; Krimmer, 2008; Richards, 2013; Townsend, 2012; Zhang, 2014), media and cultural studies (Biressi, 2004; Dauphinee, 2007), political and feminist studies (Philipose, 2007), and sexuality studies (Ross, 2012).

This does not imply that her arguments have simply been naively accepted. For example, Douglass and Wilderson (2013) question Scarry's assumptions about the nature of the subject prior to being tortured, Ross (2012) in her investigation of masochism troubles Scarry's implicit definition of pain as bad, Bernatchez (2009, p. 216) similarly questions the distinction between 'innocent-victim and culpable torturer', whilst Bourke (2011) argues that Scarry underplays the sociocultural and historical nature of pain. More importantly it also does not imply that her work has been adequately represented during this time. Rather it has been her explorations of pain as unmaking, specifically in torture and war, which have been most consistently utilised. Less visible, although not absent (e.g., Thompson, 2006), across this work are Scarry's comments on creativity, the making of the world, or her fascinating explorations of the body in biblical texts and in the work of Marx.

At this moment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bodies seem to be so astonishingly exploitable, so completely emptied out and yet strangely filled out. Within our world, the suffering body-subject seems now so central for entertainment, whether in reality shows of multiple forms or as fodder for news channels. Corporeality is perpetually and innovatively colonised and dissected and reshaped by medicine and self-disciplinary technologies. These disciplines and innovations are in an intimate relationship with corporate capital where every micron and dimension of the soma is sought for commodification. The result are global battles to both cover and uncover the body; its penetration, eruption and destruction by nefarious methods new and old made only more ironic by the simultaneous and intimately related innovations by viral and bacterial species.

On the other hand, the body has been reconceived, reclaimed, opened up to, and embedded in the world, celebrated in its diversity and plasticity, made sacred and subjectified, and put in perpetual motion through a myriad of channels. Its richness and wonder as a self-conscious substance that is gendered, raced, sexed, and classed is constantly articulated; made explicit is a body that desires,

transgresses, excites, perplexes, and resists attempts to bring it under control whether by science, fundamentalism or neoliberal surveillance.

In the wake of peculiar battles over what counts as torture, of war as perpetual, of contradictory claims as to the body's sacredness, of battles to heal or simply survive, it seems very apt at the point of this 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary to call for articles reflecting, utilising, commenting, redirecting, reconceiving, and reengaging with Scarry's important text. Importantly, this means asking what the implications are of such work for the contemporary embodied subject; both with regard to its conceptualisation and, significantly, to its being, becoming and experience. Contributors are therefore advised to explicitly locate their contributions with respect to current debates around, or related to, notions of subjectivity, experience, embodiment, subjection and subjectification, and in relation to theories and analytics to which subjectivity is relevant (for example, discourse, practice, habit, affect, emotion or feeling). We thus propose to collect, review and edit contributions of this nature for a special edition of *Subjectivity* on the continued relevance of Scarry's *The body in pain*.

The aim would be to bring this about by late 2016 so as to coincide as closely as possible with the anniversary of the publication of Scarry's text. Accordingly, we call for the submission of abstracts (100-150 words) along with a title and brief biography for all authors (50-100 words) by the end of March 2015 (to [c.vanommen@massey.ac.nz](mailto:c.vanommen@massey.ac.nz)). The outcomes of the abstract review process will follow by end April 2015, submission of manuscripts by the end of November 2015, review and feedback to authors by end March 2016, and submission to the journal editors of completed papers and the editorial by May 2016.

We are ultimately looking for six articles to comprise this special issue and have already received indications of interest from several academics.

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