Charting the Interdisciplinary Course

We are all bodies—sensing, moving creatures, wonderfully simple, wonderfully complex. We draw, we write, we walk, we dance. We are sound-makers and song-makers. We are creatures of habit, but also creatures of change, creativity, and curiosity. We are all these dimensions and more, potentially and actually. In the flesh, down to and into our bones, we are all bodies.

This gathering of essays brings together an interdisciplinary array of understandings of what it is to be the bodies we are. It is an opening movement aimed at redressing the imbalance created by Cartesian dualism. In its own way, each essay calls into question certain culturally embedded ways of valuing the body that deride or ignore its role in making us human. In its own way, each essay thus helps restore what is properly due the body since seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes convinced us that mind and body are separate, and that mind is the primary value. Moreover in its own way, each essay helps elucidate what is properly due the body since the more recent Western twentieth-century emphasis
upon vision effectively reduced the richness of the affective and
tactile-kinesthetic body—the body of felt experience—to a simple
sum of sensations.

The time is ripe for a thoroughgoing reappraisal of the body. The
legacy of Descartes's metaphysics has been not only to divide
the fundamental integrity of creaturely life, but also to depreciate
the role of the living body in knowing and making sense of the
world, in learning, in the creative arts, and in self- and interpersonal
understandings. The Cartesian legacy has in essence reduced the
body by turns to a static assemblage of parts and to a dumb show of
movement. The living sense of the body, and its propensity for
sense-making, have been blotted out by top-heavy concerns with
brains, minds, consciousness, and language, these latter being con-
strued by many people as virtually self-sufficient "mental" systems,
all the rest being just so much in the way of mechanical peripheral
support.

It is this conception of the body as mere handmaiden to the
privileged that is in process of revision. The revision, be it noted, is
no mere cosmetic surgery. The traditional Cartesian view of the
body as drone to an all-powerful, rational mind has complex as well
as deep roots. Their complexity and depth are apparent in the every-
day attitudes, interests, values, and behaviors that in general define
twentieth-century American society and that are daily reinforced
and reflected back in one way and another by Western media. For
example, the body is not only something to be ministered to when
sick, fed when hungry, exercised regularly, and put to bed when
tired. It is more finely conceived as something to protect and care for
like a possession—a car, for example; as something to read about
regularly—up-to-date scientific information is essential; as some-
thing to assess sexually at various levels and according to various
standards of beauty; and more. We are advised, for instance, to have
the body appraised physically once a year, to air it daily, but also to
shelter it from damaging sun rays. We are advised to give it pills to
safeguard its heart, and certain vegetables to insure the proper func-
tioning of its bowels. We are advised to flatten its "stomach," and to
clothe it in alluring and enticing ways. We are advised to keep its
desires in check, to "manage" its stress, and to obliterate its
wrinkles, odors, and unwanted hairs. Clearly, a complex of attitudes
and values feeds into the traditional view, all of them buttressing a
conception of our bodies as a kind of personal dumbwaiter each of us
has at our disposal. To assure a smooth and continuous perform-
ance, we must on the one hand keep abreast of the latest in dumb-
waiter science and technology, and aesthetic maintenance, and on the other hand know how to trouble-shoot in case of breakdowns and accidents.

The picture is perhaps exaggerated. Yet when attention is turned to the dominant ways in which the body is viewed in our society—one need only glance at popular magazines and tabloids, peruse the daily newspaper, glimpse summaries of television programs about the body, or notice movie advertisements—the picture of the body as “an extended substance”—a purely physical object—seems unmitigated. It is against this background of what might be called “popular body noise” that the need to promote humanistic understandings of the body becomes clearly and readily apparent. When the body is treated as a purely material possession, our humanness is diminished. Popular body noise drowns out the felt sense of our bodies and a felt sense of our individual aliveness. In place of these felt senses is a preeminently visual object groomed in the ways of quite specific, all-pervasive, culturally-engrained attitudes and values. What is diagnosed as needing thinner thighs, increased fiber, stress-reduction, or an at-home aerobic device, is precisely a culturally-seduced visual object. We no longer listen to our bodies directly, but only to what modern science tells us about our bodies, and not just at the level of food, sex, and stress, but at the level of neuroanatomical/physiological facts: how our brains work, how our eyes see, how our hearts react to trauma, and so on. The living sense of ourselves vanishes in the din of popular body noise.

The view of the body as something that in time will wear down—and out—as something whose parts can be replaced by parts from other individuals, as something whose material insides are as accessible as its material outsides, and so on, is part of the same view of the body as an object. As suggested above, the view is strongly undergirded by scientific perspectives which not only reduce the body to a thing, treating it as a finely functioning machine, but which also are concerned with it as an essentially visual object, an amalgam of structures, tissues, cells, genes, and so on. From the grossest to the finest level, the body is analyzed in terms of things seen—object(ive) realities. Given this purview, it is not surprising that the somatically felt body—the body that feels joy, sadness, and anger, the body that feels nostalgia and despair—and the tactile-kinesthetic body—the body that feels itself in the act of moving and touching—are all but repudiated. What is not objectified by sight does not invite twentieth-century Western scientific study.

It is one thing to acknowledge the limitations of a particular
approach and quite another to presume that there are no limitations, that is, that a given approach is exhaustive. The latter presumption threatens integrity. Blind allegiance to the tenets of twentieth-century Western science culminates in hypervisualism, a theoretical stance in which vital, living aspects of persons, particularly those having to do with bodily feelings of emotion and bodily feelings of movement and touch, are not given their due.

What is needed merely to balance the equation are values that substantiate the human aspects of being a body. The need is for understandings which do justice to the multiple ways in which the body has been, and is, part of our living human heritage—from the beginnings of human language, for example, to body-mind transformations achieved through ‘just sitting’ Eastern methods of meditation. In short, the promotion of humanistic understandings of the body is a much needed counter to the more familiar, and certainly more widely publicized, scientific understandings of the body everywhere apparent in present-day American society from choice of fish oils to the most effective aerobics. The essays which follow delineate just such fundamental bodily aspects of our humanness.

There is a further dimension in which humanistic understandings of the body can be realized. Ways in which the body is treated, and attitudes toward it, are quintessentially informative of a civilization’s basic tenets and values. We are only just beginning to appreciate this fact both through socio-historical studies of the body and through ever-increasing awarenesses of the connection between “our bodies ourselves” and the body which is earth. Such beginning appreciations can lead to the broad and deep socio-political realization that understandings of what it is to be human necessarily include, if not begin with, understandings of something common to all peoples and to all civilizations, something not outside of, but fundamental to, each and every personal existence: the living body. Precisely this kind of awareness was promoted by the earthquake in Armenia in 1987. As one newspaper article quoted a Soviet embassy official in Washington, “Suddenly [Americans] realize that we are the same human beings, [that] we can feel the pain as well.” That we seem to need devastating natural disasters to remind us of our common humanity says something about our highly touted “humanness,” and our elevated sense of ourselves as distinct from “the beasts.” Clearly, we have much to learn about ourselves and the world. Our bodies provide us the most fundamental starting point. Precisely because they provide us a common denominator, bodily
understandings have the possibility of ransoming us, as much from insulated arrogance as from indifferent violence.

The aim of the essays which follow is to awaken basic dimensions of ourselves as living bodies, in German poet Rainier Rilke's memorable words, to awaken the "unlived lines of our bodies." The achievement of this aim should eventuate at the same time in an awakening of a sense of our human condition, a heightened awareness not merely of our immediate culture, but a heightened awareness of our cultural and evolutionary heritage, and in consequence of the commonalities undergirding human experience. The pursuit of self-understandings ultimately demands such an evolutionary perspective and pan-cultural attentiveness. The interdisciplinary scope of the essays is of singular value in this respect since it attests to a variety of commonalities in human experience, thus to the importance of recognizing the foundational relationship between human bodies and human cultural and evolutionary histories.

Albert A. Johnstone's essay offers the first challenge. His essay shows why Descartes should have listened more carefully to the several objections formulated by his favorite disciple, Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia. In particular, it examines the keystone of Descartes's view, namely, his claim that a thinking being (which for him is a being which doubts, denies, wants, feels, perceives) is conceivable independently of extended or bodily being. Descartes's claim is tested with regard to three aspects of thinking: (a) feeling, (b) willing, and (c) thinking proper. Johnstone shows how the introspective approach advocated by Elizabeth, and adopted by Descartes himself on related issues, finds Elizabeth to have made the more perceptive observations. In each case, the tactile-kinesthetic body is found to be an inalienable constituent of the thinking subject. Johnstone shows incidentally how the Cartesian formula is affected by this finding. "I think, therefore I am," becomes "I, possibly a hoax, think; therefore I, possibly a hoax, am"—surely a devastating blow to the self-image of Cartesian thinking substances.

In his essay on contemporary Japanese philosopher Yasuo Yuasa, Shigenori Nagatomo invites us to consider a conception of minds and bodies quite different from Descartes's. Yuasa's 'bodyscheme' is an attempt to bring together four different 'circuits' of the body: the neurophysiological, the kinesthetic and somesthetic, the emotional-instinctual, and the psychological. In contrast to Western scientific construals, these circuits or planes of body functioning are not separate self-sufficient systems to be ministered to in piecemeal
fashion by specialists. They are thoroughly integrated, entwined facets of bodily life. As Nagatomo demonstrates, only through the recognition of such a comprehensive body-scheme do phenomena such as ki-energy, systems of medicine such as acupuncture, and meditational practices eventuating in altered states of consciousness become explainable. Most importantly, as Nagatomo shows, self-cultivation as an epistemological undertaking is somatic in character: knowledge is gained through the body. At one level, self-cultivation as an Eastern concept is the epistemological equivalent of Socrates’s “Know thyself.” But it is at the same time a radically different precept on three counts: it originates in a disciplined practice of the body rather than a disciplined practice of the intellect; it culminates in a different kind of knowledge of the self; and it underscores the continuity and unity of self and world.

Daniel Moerman is an anthropologist who has long been concerned with the metaphysical implications of Western medicine. His studies of native American herbal medicines not only offer the most complete inventory and account of how plants were and are used by American Indians to cure human ailments; they pose questions concerning why such a therapeutic relationship should exist between humans and plants in the first place, and how the curative—and poisonous—effects of certain plants are mediated and how those effects might have been discovered. In his essay, “Minding the Body: The Placebo Effect Unmasked,” Moerman is concerned with the same basic metaphysical question: Why and how are certain medical treatments effective? The only difference here is that his concern is not with the efficacy of culturally recognized drugs but on the contrary, with the inexplicable power of culturally “disenfranchised” placebos. Moerman presents an array of research findings substantiating the fact that pills containing virtually nothing but sugar have healing powers, and that to the publically unacknowledged consternation of the medical community, the color of a pill, for example, as well as patients' estimations of their physicians, influence whether and to what degree a prescribed pill has a positive effect. His review of the research on placebos shows beyond doubt that starch tablets or injections of saline solution can cure any condition which can be cured, and further, that sometimes such cures are better and longer lasting than those produced by standard pharmaceutical drugs. As Moerman points out, the realities of the placebo effect indicate that simplistic explanations—such as “mind over matter”—or easy scientific labelings—such as “psychosomatic medicine”—cannot adequately account for the complexities of the
situation. His suggestion, of course, is that physiognomic aspects of treatment must first of all be recognized as existing by the medical community, whether a matter of pill color, tacit beliefs about size vis-à-vis the efficacy of a pill, or the interpersonal dynamics—the unspoken "dance," as Moerman calls it—that regularly takes place between patient and doctor. If Descartes was troubled by phantom limbs as evidence of how our senses can deceive us, he would have been that much more troubled by placebos as indicators of how our senses, our sense of a situation, our sense of the pills we take, and our sense of our physician, can cure us. Clearly there is more to relieving the pains of a suffering material body than controlled [or uncontrolled] substances would have us believe. To account in forthright fashion for such aspects of medicine would not simply show Cartesian dualism to be a thoroughly spurious doctrine. It would be to forge the beginnings of new, evidentially based understandings of how 'minds' and 'bodies' are all of a piece.

Peter Levine's challenge to Cartesian dualism is through an examination of trauma and of the natural resources of the body, specifically, the natural capacity of the body to defend itself and cure itself. When allowed to complete its particular course of action—when left to its own self-protective devices, in other words—the body's inherent wisdom sees it through. Levine explains how, when we thwart the completion of a self-saving action, "tonic immobility" results: the body freezes up. We are left in a state of heightened inner activity (anxiety) while outwardly little if any sign of motion is evident. He compares situations in which humans experience anxiety to situations in which nonhuman animals react to inescapable threat. As Levine tells us, it was in fact through his insights into the behavior of nonhuman animals that he began reassessing body therapy theories and methodologies. In his clinical work, he found that a fundamental way of addressing anxiety was to "renegotiate" maladaptive stress responses, that is, to relive threatening or frightening situations in such a way that thwarted bodily acts are consummated. Through renegotiation we acknowledge our need to complete patterns of thoughtful action. In acceding to the body's wisdom, we bridge the debilitating chasm opened by trauma.

When one considers the proliferation of stress management and wellness programs, one might conclude that finally the needs of the body are no longer being subordinated to the demands of production and consumption: at long last, one might think, "we have overcome Cartesian dualism and have gotten in touch with our bodies." To this optimistic spirit, Robert Kugelmann responds with strik-
ingly original and cautionary notes. In his essay, he calls into question common present-day cultural practices and attitudes with respect to "engineering stress." In the most general terms, Kugelmann's response is to challenge stress management programs as being simply means of disciplining the body. The goal of such programs is to enable adjustment to workplaces and to social relations that are transitory—chiefly from the driving pressures of technological innovation—and to a temporality characterized by speed. Kugelmann aptly shows how these programs motivate people to work with diligence in settings that are acknowledged to be intrinsically meaningless. People "get in touch with their bodies" in the sense of imagining them to be strong and flexible in demanding situations, and relaxed in threatening ones. Managing the body in the prescribed ways, Kugelmann believes, actually precludes us from listening to the meaning of stress as it is lived, namely, as a continually aborted grief in face of a world become a Heraclitean flux. To reckon honestly with our stressful world, Kugelmann urges, what we need are rituals to remember our losses, not techniques to make us more flexible and resilient in the face of change.

There are two major theses that anchor my essay, "The Materialization of the Body." The first is that materialization is the metaphysical corollary of animism (understood simply as "imbued with life"); the second, that radical materialization of the body has both de-humanizing and ethically noxious effects: it culminates in an eroded sense of self and an eroded sense of personal responsibility. The theses undergird my abbreviated chronicling of the history of Western medicine as a metaphysical history of the body. Since cultural medical practices of whatever time and place bespeak a certain conception of the body, it is not surprising that any particular history of medicine can be written as a metaphysical history of the body. Accordingly, an analysis of changing understandings of sickness and of changing medical practices in the history of Western culture offers a ready-made and unique approach to a critique of Cartesian metaphysical claims. In chronicling the materialization of the Western body—its progressive "fossilization," first at the hands of the developing medical sciences of anatomy and physiology in the sixteenth century, and then at the later hands of developing medical aspects of molecular biology in the twentieth century—the essay focuses on the progressive fragmentation of the body as a purely physical object. It shows how the adage, "a place for everything, and everything in its place" is an exemplar of the unifying principle undergirding material systematization. It furthermore shows how
the metaphysics of sickness, bodies, and people that has evolved in conjunction with Western medicine contrasts starkly not only with Eastern concepts of sickness, bodies, and people, but also with earlier Western notions as well. The contrasts are demonstrated by juxtaposing Western and Eastern conceptions of sickness, and ancient Greek and present-day Western conceptions of certain bodily realities, among which the breath.

Robert Romanyszyn, a clinical and cultural psychologist, has written a powerful narrative of a body transmogrified by sight, not a sight which through reflection allows a reciprocal relationship between seer and seen but a sight that categorically fixes the body on a geometrically-absolute grid of lines far removed from the lived lines of the living body. Romanyszyn shows how the history of this body has culminated in our own time in the body of the astronaut, a body suited up for a contrived, unearthly life in outer space, a body whose gift and legacy of immediate contact with the world of things has been withdrawn, remanded by the mechanics and physics of inhuman space. Romanyszyn’s point is far from being a negative value judgment on space exploration; it is an observation on how cultural practices can and do reinforce already dominant themes within a culture. Linear perspective vision was discovered in the fifteenth century, and became a psychological convention, a cultural habit of mind. But as Romanyszyn shows, the vectoral demands of linear perspective vision result in a line which human vision cannot follow, a vanishing point. What he goes on to show is how perspectival vision establishes an hegemony of the eye, which transforms the self into a spectator, the body into a specimen, and the world into a spectacle. In his history of the abandoned body and its shadow, Romanyszyn draws on the history of art, on literature, and on science. He ends by considering how the astronaut is a living symbol of the vanishing point of linear perspective vision. At the same time, he considers how the astronaut as a living reality leaves behind a shadow. By a shadow Romanyszyn means all those marginal figurations of the body that have haunted European linear consciousness since the fifteenth century—the witch, the madman, the monster, and in our own time, the anorexic. The shadow body left behind by the astronaut is indeed an anorexic body, a body barely capable of living by itself. This shadow body measures out its livelihood, rationing living to bare bones. As Romanyszyn aptly shows, this body too is an apt symbol of our times: it is a reflection of our concern with “light matters”—matters having to do with the visual appearance of things.
The visual appearance of things might be said to be the focus of Mical Goldfarb’s essay, but in a quite different sense. Goldfarb, a psychotherapist and artist, is concerned to show how in artistic creation the body is something other than a convenient tool for making art objects. The body is part of the very process of creating, part of the very thinking that goes into the making of a painting. By listening to “inner experience,” artists succeed in capturing the felt quality of things. Attention to inner experience can furthermore facilitate the process of creation at times when impasses seem suddenly to constrict all creative activity. Using her own artistic experience and the experience of other artists as examples, Goldfarb shows how artist’s block—that seemingly impassable solidity that obtrudes itself sometimes with obdurate firmness—can actually open the way to a clarity of vision. Rather than fighting the block, attempting to ignore it, or otherwise deal with it as an altogether negative experience, Goldfarb shows how attending to the block in a bodily sense frees one’s energies. Indeed, rather than playing deaf to the impasse, the artist listens to it in depth; she/he not only makes room for it but hears it out.

Eugene Gendlin, well-known founder of the psychotherapeutic technique of focusing, examines ways in which a bodily felt sense operates in everyday life situations as well as in deeper self-understandings. In his essay, “The Wider Role of the Body in Thought and Language,” he shows us in new and distinctive ways how a bodily felt sense is fundamental to our acts of thinking and speaking. In particular, he invites us to consider how the body implies, and how, by listening to its ‘implyings’ we come to fresh awarenesses and create new meanings. Drawing both on the most common of daily human experiences and on his own clinical experience, Gendlin shows us that there is an intricacy to our bodily life that not only far exceeds the possibilities of any merely material substance or mere robot utterly wed to culturally-derivative fads and forms of experience, but that far exceeds the categories and distinctions we take to order our lives. He sees this bodily “excess” as itself an order, an order of meanings—bodily implyings. He furthermore sees this order of meanings as literally coming from the body in the same way that sleep, appetite, orgasm, and emotions come from the body. In a broader sense, his research demonstrates that there is indeed such a thing as human nature, and that what is necessary to its appreciation is an opening to the ways in which the body speaks to us, ways that are not part of the established cultural order but that break through to a different order.
An equally new perspective on the body and language is presented by Mary LeCron Foster, an anthropological linguist. Recent investigations into the origin and evolution of human language point toward the centrality of the body and of bodily awarenesses in the very genesis of language. The relationship of the body to the beginnings of language might at first seem complex and remote in comparison to the relationship of the body to, say, illness, or the emotions, and this because in sickness and in our everyday emotional lives we are immediately aware of experiences of the body and can thus readily recognize and recall such experiences. In contrast, not only does a discussion of the origin of language take us far back in evolutionary time, but an awareness of our articulatory gestures in the course of our everyday speech is virtually absent: we are attentive not to the means whereby we are making speech sounds, but to speech itself. Yet the awareness of both movement and touch, as when the tongue touches the palate in sounding a t, or when top and bottom lips touch in sounding an m, was once the origin and anchor of linguistic meanings. In her essay, Foster shows how language arose as an extension of a mammalian mimic use of the body or of body parts, or in broader terms, how analogical thinking is at the very core of human thinking. She demonstrates how spatial relationships and movements observed in nature were imitated and communicated by shaping and manipulating the tongue and the lips—how, in other words, articulatory gestures and their referents were analogically related. The articulatory gesture m, for example, is analogically related to such meanings as “bringing together,” and “pressing against.” Though vastly changed, our language today still preserves in an attenuated form vestiges of these analogical beginnings. As Foster shows, we can still sense in our articulatory gestures the tactile-kinetic relationships obtaining between gesture and meaning. A true appreciation by the reader of these relationships necessitates a “mouths-on” approach, something akin to an appreciation of what we must have experienced when we first learned a language, specifically when we first learned the intricacies of our own mother tongue, and not those of some other tongue. Foster’s theory of monogenesis—a single origin of language—is based upon her extensive knowledge of languages, and on her systematic reconstruction of early language through the postulation of regular sound change. Her essay brings to light the essential role of the body in the origin and evolution of language, and in particular underscores the significance of the tactile-kinesthetic body to consistent and systematic linguistic patterning. In her analysis, the
articulate tactile-kinesthetic body is clearly recognized not as the simple means by which human language is uttered, as if language were in the head, and the body were simply a convenient tool for chattering out its messages. It is recognized as the very source both of the conception of language and of original linguistic meanings.

An internal connectedness is readily apparent in the progression of essays, each one opening in a further way a particular dimension of the one preceding. Common themes are equally readily apparent in the original inquiries and findings summarized above. Some of these themes may seem startlingly new, yet like newly discovered stars or galaxies, they have been there all along, hidden behind either cultural or theoretical blinders. That thinking is not something a mind does in a metaphysical vacuum is a notion that permeates Johnstone’s, Gendlin’s, Foster’s, Goldfarb’s, and Moerman’s essays. That cultural histories inform our lives is a theme permeating both Romanyszyn’s essay and my own. At the same time, as Foster’s essay shows explicitly, as Levine’s work demonstrates, and as Johnstone’s, Gendlin’s, and Nagatomo’s analyses each strongly suggests, something far deeper than culture also informs our lives. Something called “human nature” transcends the bounds imposed by any cultural standards, or perhaps better, subtends cultural norms—the experience of seated meditation, for example, as Nagatomo shows us; or the experience of a bodily felt sense, as Gendlin show us; or the experience of working through artist’s block, as Goldfarb shows us; or the experience of feelings of love or anger, as Johnstone shows us. All such experiences are pan-cultural possibilities; they are not the treasure of a particular culture. Whether identified specifically as evolutionary dimensions of humanness or not, fundamental human capacities and possibilities—pan-cultural invariants—clearly inform our lives no less than particular cultural capacities and possibilities.

It is pertinent in this context to underscore the common body that not only subtends cultural differences but also subtends gender differences. None of the essays addresses current gender issues. This is not because gender issues are thought unimportant but because more fundamental issues are of concern here. The body that is conceived as an assemblage of parts or as a dumb show of movement is a gender-neutral human body. In more immediate terms, the body that responds to placebos, that experiences trauma and anxiety, that sounds the letter *m*, that becomes ill with a cold, that is illuminated by a felt sense, that creates art, that ‘just sits’ meditating and in ‘just sitting’ is transformed from the everyday—this body is founda-
tionally a *human* body. It is specific to neither a male nor a female body exclusively. Indeed, an array of fundamental human phenomena point to the body not only as cultural universal but also as gender-neutral. All humans feel pain, for example. In recognizing and acknowledging this basic human phenomenon, we could say, paraphrasing the earlier cited remark of a Soviet official, that “Suddenly men and women realize that they are both human beings, that men as well as women, women as well as men, can feel pain.” Similarly with the foundational human phenomenon (or phenomena) addressed in each essay. Gender differences, where they arise in the context of the discussion or analysis, do so on the ground of the fundamental human phenomenon in each case. Thus Moerman, for example, reviewing studies of the placebo effect, cites gender differences in color choice; Romanyszyn, describing the bodily legacy of a culture-induced linear perspective vision, speaks of the (male) astronaut and the (female) anorexic, though neither astronaut nor anorexic are always male and female bodies respectively; Goldfarb describes both male and female artists’ ways of working, but the ways are peculiar to neither male nor female. In each case gender difference is subtended by something more basic. The current concern and predilection for uncovering and analyzing gender differences should not blind us to the corporeal ties that bind us in a common humanity—nor to the importance of devoting ourselves equally to the understanding of those ties. That there are such corporeal ties and that they are of foundational significance in our everyday lives are powerful if tacit themes uniting the gathered essays.

That our present-day Western culture is mesmerized by vision and that we have all but forgotten the felt body, the body of both tactile-kinesthetic and affective experience, is a theme that permeates Romanyszyn’s essay, and one that is also very much present in Nagatomo’s and Johnstone’s essays. In fact another recurrent theme explicitly addressed in detail in Johnstone’s and Nagatomo’s essays is that emotions—somatic/tactile-kinesthetic feelings—are bodily realities and belong to the whole body, not just selected parts of it. This same theme surfaces in other essays—in Kugelmann’s, Levine’s, Moerman’s, and my own essay—precisely because of the concern of these essays with sickness and health. Indeed, given the fact that many if not all of the above specified themes are in various ways integrally related to sickness and health, it is not surprising that sickness and health themselves emerge as themes in challenges to a Cartesian metaphysics.

Another common theme of great import is that of wholeness,
and wholeness in two senses: the body is neither an amalgam of separate systems nor is it an entity separate from a mind. All of these essays in one way and another offer evidence of that wholeness; each thereby substantively challenges conceptions of bodies and persons that denigrate or ignore their integrity. In this respect it should be emphasized that the mind-body issues addressed in this book are not those arising within what is commonly called the "representational theory of perception." As Johnstone deftly points out in the opening essay, there are at least two mind/body problems: the thought/body problem and the mind/brain problem. Problems of the latter sort are met with in the context of the representational theory of perception. What that theory attempts to explain are phenomena such as bent pencils in glasses, red suns at sunset, and the physical indistinguishability of nerve impulses in spite of their distinctive sensory origins. It explains such phenomena by affirming the brain to be the fabricator of representations of the external world. The interdisciplinary challenges gathered together here are in effect not addressed to the issues arising within what is basically a scientific explanation of how we perceive what we do; they are addressed to the thought/body problem—to the conceptual dichotomy introduced by Descartes with his thinking and extended substances. Each essay shows in its own way how in our everyday thoughts, feelings, and actions, in our illnesses, in our recoveries, in our paths of self-cultivations, and so on, we are not two substances, one definitively reigning supreme, one definitively diminished. We are all of a piece. By giving the body its due, each essay brings to the fore the possibility of ultimately restoring to wholeness precisely what was conceptually sundered by Descartes and what in turn became the dominant problem in Western metaphysics.

Another recurrent theme is in fact the body's capacity to cure itself. The theme is readily apparent in Levine's, Moerman's, and my own essay, and it is evidentially supported by each of us in different ways. In his essay, too, Kugelmann implicitly recognizes the body's capacity to cure itself and in this respect, his analysis closely compliments Levine's. Where Levine speaks explicitly of the body curing itself by "renegotiating" trauma, Kugelmann speaks of the need of rituals by which the body might acknowledge its "continually aborted grief." By whatever name, and whatever its particular dynamic form, stress is loss, and loss is recovered only by recovering the body that was once integrally present but now remains unattended or left behind. Nagatomo, Gendlin, and Goldfarb also implicitly emphasize the body's capacity to cure itself.
Their essays affirm that the quite ordinary body of quite ordinary human experience holds the key to lightening its own miseries, provided one stops to listen to it and gives it its due. Indeed, the lore and wisdom of “the ordinary body” is thematic throughout the whole.

Wholeness, self-healing, cultural histories, pan-cultural invariants, thinking, emotions, the tactile-kinesthetic body, the body’s wisdom—what are these themes telling us? Surely they are awakening us to the richness of our bodily lives, and asking us to listen to that richness and to question received notions that devalue our sense of our bodies. Just as surely they are telling us that cultural influences can be pernicious, as pernicious as biological “influences” in the form of certain viruses, bacteria, and chemicals. Not only are stress, hypervisualism, popular body noise, a wholly material view of bodies, and the like, cultural diseases, Cartesianism itself is a cultural disease. Cartesianism tells us that we are schizoid creatures, one-half of which is little more than a mechanical rig for getting us about in the world. When we unquestioningly accept this diagnosis of our nature, we give up living in our bodies and enter a cultural insanitarium. Our only way out is through corporeal reflection. Through a recognition and contemplation of the ‘deep structures’ of our bodily selves, we have the possibility of rediscovering and reaffirming wholeness, self-healing, emotions, tactile-kinesthetic experience—all those dimensions of our bodily lives which we deposited at the doorstep when we entered.

Given the depth, breadth, and implications of these new and original essays, the recovery and revaluation of the body augurs well. There is too much awaiting discovery and understanding—even too much now at stake—for bodies to be catapulted to prominence merely for fifteen minutes of twentieth-century fame or for them to become merely an arcane delight at specialist gatherings or the dernier cri in purely academic discussions. Through ever-widening and deepening experiences and through researches which take account of the body in language, philosophy, medicine, ethics, society, culture, and more, including an ecological sense of a world in which bodies find their proper place, a profound and lasting appreciation of the body is possible. In this extended sense, the body is already being given its due. An attentive turning toward the body, “the corporeal turn,” is already under way. In this extended sense, burgeoning new inquiries and findings, as they mature and coalesce, will surely come to prevail as a metaphysics that upholds the truths of experience.