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Bodymapping

I KNOW WHY you want to put me to sleep. So you can get a good look at my body, so you can stare, make jokes. As a doctor, a specialist with a title that chokes the awake tongue, of course you know that anaesthetized patients hear.

A chakra ceiling. A chakra ceiling in a hospital. My mirror, this ceiling, this hall outside the operating room with this ceiling of small round holes, points of power, points of entry

What I did with my body

Skin Diary

In the beginning I was as smooth as round as a pebble. I know this because my daughter was born smooth and round. Like mother like daughter. Baby skin oil paper translucent, the milky blood just under the surface. No scar that isn't round, point of entry, mother to daughter, closed to the world with a twist of catgut, an umbilical ancestor, placenta from placere, to please. I was pleased to bury ours out in the yard, not my mother who thought she was pleased to have a hand clasped over her nose and mouth, her grunts civilized with chloroform.

Skin Diary

Scar inventory: sole nail hole, knee gravel pits, vagina husband's stitch (episiotomy only sounds like appease), throat tonsil snip. These are the

cuts performed upon me, some random, some careless, some crass. There are scars of my own choosing, not recognized by the doctor who jokes as he holds the scalpel above my abdomen.

Existence from the Latin *existere*, to be set apart.

Tic tac paddywhack give the dog a bone, not one of mine, only soft tissue excised, "I am the owner of my bones, in life as in death." The French are so sure of their rights. Born out of revolution revolving to someone like Barthes who can write such things as that and this, "In both sets of grandparents, language belonged to the women. Matriarchy? In China, long ago, the entire community was buried around the grandmother." And what of her scars? An inventory: pin pricks and soot, dots that mark her from head to left hand following a line that begins behind her left ear. A constellation with few curves, she has nineteen small dark circles no bigger than moles tattooed down her neck shoulder arm to the base of her little finger. Her Ki, "key" to vitality. In the earth, in that black hole, the ancestral home, there are nineteen pin pricks of light. That is how the living know where to bring home the dead. The Ki is energy, the body its mortal coil.

Skin Diary

The joke is predictable. They find it incredibly funny. His hand, the one holding the scalpel, shakes with laughter cutting small slits in the Ki above my abdomen. This hurts more than flesh. I concentrate on Manipura. The clock on the wall stops, as does the patient monitor, the lights fade. "Jesus H. Christ, now what?" The surgeon is no longer laughing. He drops his hand. I remove my attention from my solar plexus.

Skin Diary

Shock. In my fifth year of meditation, my first chakra, Manipura, opened. I knew nothing of chakra. I was a graduate of yoga classes held in a United Church basement. I was a calm and supple practitioner of deep breathing and body manipulation. I had a red rag rug. I wore loose clothing. I did not desire mood swings, stomach trouble, fatigue, clairvoyance. Diagnosis: spastic colon, virus, emotional exhaustion, hallucination, Barr Epstein. Prescription: get some exercise, get a hobby, occupy your mind. More yoga, get back to breathless calm. I found a yoga master. He told me I was occupying my body.

The monitor resumes ticking, the clock stays silent. Something has changed. The surgeon feels it in his scalpel hand.

Skin Diary

The yoga master speaks: Atomos, uncut, hence undivided, hence indivisible, the Greek for atom. The Greek alchemists had the serpent Uroboros, the tail-biting snake, the circle. By the Middle Ages, the alchemists of Golden Lane had the salamander, guardian and spirit of transmutation. Early cartographers drew dragons in unknown territory.

He said this on our first meeting while staring at the tiny dragon tattooed on the inside of my wrist. It is so small that most people mistake it for a cherry mole or a birth mark. He did not miss take it. I was uncharted territory.

Then he said: Uncut, indivisible the absolute one from which you are born combines equally all elements to create pure energy, there is no duality.

I think he is staring at my breasts when he says this. But he's not. He's staring at the pain that I believe to be a stomach ulcer and he's saying, It burns, doesn't it, with the heat of a miniature sun.

The surgeon visualizes the position of the scalpel, a common exercise, a rote map for invasion of the physical body. The other two bodies are not his concern. He is not a doctor of philosophy. To cut is to exist. The uncuttable is the unspeakable. He leaves the atom to the physicists.

Skin Diary

Cartography is the story of my life. It is my life's work. I am a cartographer's cartographer. Not a mapmaker, but a student of maps. A lie, no, a half truth, half life. Half a life to prepare, to be capable of a bodymap. I'm no Strabo in the library of ancient Alexandria. I'm a clerk in Geological Survey. I sell maps. Free with every map are the things I know: Solinus wrote popular geography for the pilgrims of the Middle Ages. His tour advice was singular, evocative, exotic. Go to Germany, the towns are lighted by birds that glow in the dark. Now, the Steppes are a must, cold yes, but where else will you find men with ears so big they use them for blankets at night. And the ladies among you will be thrilled by the Britons, their flesh embroidery is renowned.

I give tips: How to enhance your map—to lay gold leaf, first draw the design with a fine brush dipped in garlic juice, then lay the gold leaf on the map using a very soft rabbit's foot brush.

I work in ink and needles.

Certainly, time is a consideration. To someone like me, place is paramount. In this I am sister to Ptolemy, Galileo and the Bird Man of Alcatraz. To the surgeon, time is on his side. My appendix is inflamed but not to bursting. It's only critical to his sense of propriety that the clock in the operating room has stopped time. He believes he has time enough to indulge the curiosity of the scientist. Before he sets to work, he would like to know just what organs I've mapped. "Look here," he says, "if you connect the dots, she's diagrammed the autonomic nervous system." The nurse asks, "What good is it to her? I'd like to know." The clock ticks over.

Skin Diary

In the time that I was smooth and round, I was smooth and round the way a balloon is—stretched. Growing, my skin no longer fit, was a torment like too tight shoes. The needles helped. Deflating skin takes much thought. It is a philosophy, an art. The dragon on my wrist came later, after the safety pin and ball point pen. All I wanted was a flower-shaped safety valve to bleed off what was under my skin. I embroidered my navel with the bigheaded sunflower of childhood. My best friend chose scarification of both wrists as her rites of passage.

Dragon, originally from the Greek, *drakōn*, huge serpent, so named because of its quick-glancing, terrible eyes.

"Arms and legs too," a nurse points out. "Like tiny moles. But a definite pattern when you really look." Another asks, "What about her back? Maybe she's got MOM tattooed on her shoulder. Or a recycle symbol on her butt."

Skin Diary

Take my pulse. Place your sterile fingers over the dragon on my wrist. Satisfied with the gross heartbeat, your gloved sensibilities know nothing of the dragon's tongue. The avatar of ancient goddesses, the snake, the dragon tongues sparks. Practised skin, subtle fingers feel vibrations, the warm pulse of Ki.

The three bodies, it has been repeatedly claimed by yogic doctrine, are connected to one another through the chakras, which exist concurrently in the causal and astral dimensions, and whose function seems to reflect directly into the physical body. The causal body may be likened to the Christian concept of the spirit, as the astral body may be to the notion of soul, in that it is the highest part of our being, the part closest to the Absolute.

Skin Diary

Engrossed with my power points, you've failed to notice the thin scar that encircles my neck and the sign of the cross raised on the flesh of my throat. Not exotic enough, I suppose. The lightning entered behind my left ear and exited through my pelvis. The paramedic remarked to my dad that if I had been a boy, both testicles would have been ripped apart. Lucky, huh. Besides melting my gold necklace and crucifix into my skin, that cattle prod out of the sky jolted my Ki. To map the points at which the tri energy, the three-personed Ki flows together in my body, all I had to do was stick a needle in the tip of my little finger and mark with a ball point pen the points on my left arm shoulder neck where I felt St. Elmo's fire. I have nineteen tatau marks, nineteen pin pricks of light. I will need no headstone.

Points of entry, power points. The argument: In the beginning was neither existence nor nonexistence.

The scalpel is poised. Something is different, the surgeon feels it in his hand. An irresistible pull toward the invisible line that connects the dots on my abdomen. It's as if the scalpel has entered a magnetic field. He tries to shrug off the mental suggestion of the joke he thinks is influencing his hand. I want him to execute the joke. I am focused on the appropriate chakras. He hesitates. I centre my energy along the best points of entry. It's too much, the lights go out. In that moment of darkness he sees himself cut along the dotted line, open the envelope of skin, pull out the mystery, hold it in his hand for examination, put it under the microscope for close scrutiny. He's bound to be disappointed.