

## ***Fè yon rasanblaj: a body portal fantasy book***

Carlos Ulises Decena | Rutgers University

My body holds the force of life I call a self, the desire to become that moves it through my days, the will to question its topographies that guides this inquiry. At once the matter that makes others and myself aware of the space I take up and the beginning of elsewhere, my body is also the pair of eyes that meets eyes in front of the mirror, the voice that says to leave a message on my answering machine, and the ink that spills on these pages, transfigured by digitization into a computer file and, today, into the word valleys through which other eyes slide. My body, that gathering of joints, muscles, emotions wrapped in flesh that opens as fertile earth before hot beats, sits in satisfaction at the brief plenitude of a good meal, or dwells endlessly on the taste of a lover—that body, that comes and cums, that gives advice and that pleasures and sobs before its present and its history—is where I begin.

There is a book I want to write. Let's call it *Body Portals*.

portal, n.

a. A door, gate, doorway, or gateway, of stately or elaborate construction; the entrance to a large or magnificent building, esp. when emphasized in architectural treatment; any door or gate (chiefly poet.). (Oxford English Dictionary Online, Accessed 9/11/2012)

I propose taking a step away from imagining and imaging the human body as one holistic unit. Let's disarticulate the body, stop assuming it to be whole, start to grasp the force fields, energies, and other elements that flow through it, constitute and render it incoherent in existing epistemes and models for its apprehension.

*Fè yon rasanblaj*. What if the body, made up of habits, tendencies, and orientations, itself gave us clues about these sedimentations that we do not access directly, the vital flows, transfers, and exchanges we might otherwise not grasp? What if our bodies themselves are such gatherings?

Much late twentieth-century scholarship drew increased attention to the fragmentations of the human body itself, pointing over and over to the elements that challenge its wholeness. Art and literature of the same period have helped us think about ways to live without the need for coherence, for having all of the answers, for having complete and whole bodies all of the time. As technology becomes not just a defining feature of contemporary life, but the very means through which sociality becomes possible, how might we think the social? Which features of our present are tied to our past, which break from it, and which ones channel these transformations through their utilization of new technology? Are new technologies contemporary practices that seem to mediate social relations tied to older, mythical techniques?

Could drumming as a practice be the grandparent of texting?

The person talking on her own at the train station: is she entertaining figments of a schizophrenic mind, talking to spirits, or arguing with her sister-in-law about a wedding dress via Bluetooth?

My fantasy book owes its conceit to the fantasy books about which Caribbeanist scholar Efraín Barradas has often published and discussed at professional meetings. It thinks with Caribbean artistic production about transformations of identity and sociality that shape the contours of the human body itself. This is not an appeal to the hybridized, *mestizo* body of the twentieth century. *Body Portals* maps a body that is itself a staging ground, tied not to the traditional units of analysis that reigned supreme in the twentieth century, but demanding that we pay attention and develop new modes of thought for their apprehension in our contemporary moment. If this pushes at the edges of twentieth-century protocols for knowledge and legitimacy, then my book breaks from these to advance a different kind of cultural critique, especially within feminism, Caribbean studies, and decolonial theory.

This portal book does not portend new *mestizajes*, hybridities, and creolizations. These are exhausted frames.

Many Caribbean and US Latino artists refuse to let us forget the colonial past that imbricates our present, and their work offers clues about contemporary conditions for subject formation sited in the human body itself. What do identity and belonging look like from a conceptual locus of enunciation that does not assume complete bodily coherence, but that instead maps the various mediations through which bodies become intelligible, articulate energetic fields, and engage other bodies? In what way does thinking about the human body along these lines reengage the social and the macro structural?

*Fè yon rasanblaj*. Perhaps the first step to construct that fantasy book, this “body portal,” is to vocalize this desire for its inception in this special issue, as a provocation and invitation to a gathering of forces, intellectual energies, and insights that might result not just in bodies as meeting grounds, but also in book projects that rethink the single author or the single voice as their *logos*. Perhaps that “body portal” can model intellectual praxis otherwise, intellectual work more resistant to the modalities of knowledge production, authorship, and professional advancement that have frustrated most of my own travels. I hope I am not alone.

---

**Carlos Ulises Decena** is an interdisciplinary scholar, whose work straddles the humanities and social sciences, and whose intellectual projects engage and blur the boundaries among critical ethnic, queer, and feminist studies and social justice. His first book, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men*, was published by Duke University Press in 2011. He is currently at work on two book-length

# EMISFÉRICA

---

projects: *Body Portals: Embodiment in Early 21st Century Caribbean and Latinoamerican Artivism and Circuits of the Sacred.*