

Session: Intimate Technologies: Embodying Artefacts, Remaking Bodies, Enacting Norms
Conference Theme: *Bodies, Health and Technology*

Bodily Openness and Body Modification: A Phenomenological Reading of the Habitualization of Titanium Implants

A “microdermal” is a body piercing in which a titanium anchor, implanted into the flesh, secures a titanium disc atop the flesh. This paper offers a phenomenology of the embodied experience of microdermal implants, a type of body modification dependent upon the fusion of flesh with titanium. Scholars have examined body modification as a form of culturally and historically contingent production of identity (Sullivan 2001; Pitts 2003), but few thinkers have explored how the incorporation of metal into flesh is lived, experienced, and embodied. Drawing on my first-hand experience living with microdermals, this paper explores how these implants (re)shape embodiment through the production of myriad affects as well as the (re)articulation of bodily habit, aesthetic, and schema (Merleau-Ponty 2013). What sensations and embodied adaptations do microdermals galvanize? How do such modifications queer the phenomenology of embodiment? This paper will show how microdermals—which the body treats as an open wound—create an “openness” in the body, directing it towards new and shifting sensory possibilities as well as corporeal vulnerabilities, both of which require continued attention and re-habitualization. Empirically, I draw on a journal wherein I account for my bodily sensations and my relations to other bodies and with health care practitioners. Analytically, I situate body modification at the intersection of habit, sensation, and the incorporation of technology in order to think through how body modification makes embodiment a flexible, contingent, and, in turn, open phenomenon. Overall, I will argue that body modification generates an “open embodiment” that forces a relearning of the world, a rearticulation of embodied doing, and a renewal of embodied possibility.

Sara Rodrigues
Social & Political Thought
York University
Toronto, Ontario
email: sararod@yorku.ca
tel: 1 416 795 1820