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**Regine Maritz – Tom Tölle, with the collaboration of Eva  
Seemann**

**Preface**

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## Ateliers

### CORPS ET POLITIQUE DANS LES COURS PRINCIÈRES AUX TEMPS MODERNES/ THE POLITICS OF BODIES AT THE EARLY MODERN COURT

Journée d'étude organisée par l'Institut historique allemand  
les 29 et 30 mai 2017

Études réunies par Regine Maritz et Tom Tölle  
(avec la coopération de Eva Seemann)

REGINE MARITZ – TOM TÖLLE  
(with the collaboration of EVA SEEMANN)

## PREFACE

This special issue grew out of the organizers' reading group and a two-day conference at the German Historical Institute in Paris. The conference received generous support from the Institute, Princeton University, the Institut für Geschichte der Medizin (Robert-Bosch-Stiftung, Stuttgart), and the University of Zürich. Since we all approached bodies at court from different perspectives and diverse specialist historiographies – from gendered political history (Regine Maritz), disability history (Eva Seemann), and the history of information politics (Tom Tölle) – we noticed the gaps in the debates concerning these topics across national historiographies even in an international field such as court studies. We also grappled with the widespread reluctance to integrate the history of the body into social and political histories of courts.

With our workshop, we sought to raise awareness, inspire conversation about innovative questions, and address the historiography's *lacunae* from three angles: the production of (extra) ordinary, gendered, and frail bodies. The *entrée en matière*, which we provided at our conference, also provided the framework for the historiographical analysis we offer here in the introductory article. Our conversations after the conference led us to formulate a specific research agenda that we have termed »lived corporeality«, and which we develop in our introduction. Here it should suffice to say that the approach seeks to mediate between readings of corporeality as culturally constructed and physically determined. Furthermore, the introductory article discusses the conference's central outcomes: First, it shows that corporeality is woven throughout many sources pertaining to courts, and that the concept was present in virtually all aspects of court sociability. Secondly, that corporeality provides a welcome chance to raise new questions within court studies across national and linguistic boundaries.

The first section on »Les corps (extra)ordinaires« ((Extra)ordinary Bodies) worked from the body of the ruler outward. A paper by Bénédicte Lecarpentier-Bertrand (Paris) entitled »Renouveler l'image royal. Apparences et réalités politiques sous le règne d'Henri IV« focused on Henri IV's attempts at making his body's political representation fit contemporary demands. A contribution by Eva Seemann (Zürich) shifted attention to courtiers. Focusing on court dwarfs at three German-speaking courts, Seemann used intersectionality and insights from disability studies to show how, and perhaps more importantly, if, and when, the extraordinary body of dwarfs was presented either as ordinary or as extraordinary. She suggested that in many cases the official role at court mattered more than physical difference urging historians not to assume difference, but to study the specific interactions. Monett Reissig's paper »Narrating and Negotiating the Rulers Body. Beauty and Power in Early Modern Self-Narratives« mediated between a perspective centred on the ruling couple and one focused on courtiers showing how beauty became one important concept, anchored in corporeality, with which actors navigated shifting positions in court society.

Our second section on »Les corps genrées« (Gendered Bodies) indicated the central contribution that research into gender and sexuality continues to play in raising awareness of the issues of corporeality. We discuss a central example in our introduction: Research into diplomatic »working couples« (*Arbeitspaare*), for one, have helped renew interest in the corporeality of diplomacy as a recent special issue of the »Frühneuzeit-Info«, mentioned in the introduction, suggests. For this session we included Martin Dinges (Stuttgart) as a chair, whose expertise in the history of masculinity as well as the history of medicine helped reframe the discussion in important ways. In his paper »Corps exalté, corps en danger. Risques et profits des tournois de cour à la Renaissance?«, Pierre Couhault (Paris) studied the central, yet gradually vanishing *divertissement* of jousting at early modern courts. He suggested how corporeal practices of staged violence helped constitute standards of virility. In his paper entitled »The Birth of the Sporting Women. Courtly Amazons of the Grand Siècle« Valerio Zanetti (Cambridge) discussed the corporeal dimension of the *femmes fortes*, thus anchoring otherwise often textual discussions about early modern *querelles de femmes* in physical exercise, e.g. riding, at the French court. In the section's final paper Monica Azzolini (Edinburgh) presented on »Sexual Politics. Prying into the Body of Italian Renaissance Princesses« opening up a debate about the centrality of corporeality for the politically charged topic of dynastic reproduction at court. Azzolini continues to engage in the conversation about corporeality with a set of panels at the upcoming Renaissance Society of America Conference (RSA) 2020 in Philadelphia, PA.

In an evening lecture, Stanis Perez (Paris) focused on »Le corps alchimique du Roi. Louis XIV, les médecins de la Cour et la maladie de Calais en perspective (1658)« unfolding the centrality of the ruler's body for early modern court politics from a potentially life-changing event in the early years of Louis' reign. The third section on »Les corps fragiles« (Frail Bodies) picked up where the evening discussion had ended. Susanne Helene Betz' (Vienna) paper on »Bodies of Hope. Habsburg-Medicean Marriage Negotiations between Ideal Brides and Male Counterparts« addressed the often-protracted political plots to facilitate an early modern dynastic marriage. With the Medici, Betz also continued a geographical focus on the early modern Italian peninsula begun by Azzolini. Her work has in part been published in the above-mentioned issue of »Frühneuzeit-Info«. The same is true for Julia Gebke's (Vienna) paper on »Woman, Melancholia and Politics. A Case Study in the House of Habsburg« Raphael Mandressi (Paris) rounded off the section with a paper on medicinal information politics entitled »La cour, le corps, l'exil. Jean Riolan fils, premier médecin de Marie de Médicis et informateur de Richelieu«, a contribution that focused on strategic information deployment. Mandressi is currently co-advising a new project at the German Historical Institute, Paris by Dorit Brixius, who is studying Noël Vallant (1632–1685), one prominent Parisian physician in his rich social context.

Two organizers, who did not present at the original conference, have written contributions to this issue, which put into practice a methodological focus on lived corporeality. Tom Tölle's contribution focuses on the wavering health and demise of William, Duke of Gloucester, a Protestant prince in Stuart Britain to detail how subjects near and far sought to interact with and read from his ailing body to credibly inform others, while Regine Maritz' contribution considers what a focus on corporeality can add to court historians' readings of violence and honour as modes of political interaction. Taken together, we hope that the issue will provide a forum for conversation between scholars interested in bodies at court, and more generally how the history of the body can generate new questions in political history.