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OBJECTIFIED: BODILY IMAGERY IN THE METAPHYSICAL CONCEIT

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This project investigates bodily fragmentation and metaphoric direction in seventeenth-century poetry. I focus in particular on John Donne and Richard Crashaw, two contemporaneous metaphysical poets who are often regarded as critical opposites. Close analysis of their use of bodily imagery within extended metaphors, however, reveals a common tendency to animate detached body parts in service of their poetic themes. Even as their metaphoric techniques notably diverge, both poets mobilize bodily fragments that ultimately exercise an unexpected degree of agency within their poems. This project engages with and tests the limits of Object-Oriented Ontology, a twenty-first century turn in philosophical thinking that regards objects as independent from human subjectivity, to describe the use of bodily imagery in relation to emotional and spiritual subjects. I argue that the traditional critical readings of bodily imagery in metaphysical conceits, readings that anticipate the centrality of poetic subjects, are unprepared to accommodate a wider spectrum of objective relations, including ones where bodily fragments act as independent counterparts to bodily wholes.