



Happily, thanks to support from the department and the interest of students, this Newsletter is able to come out often enough to focus on special topics as well as general literary, student, and departmental concerns. Accordingly, the theme for this issue was proposed to be: the body in literature. As you will see, a couple of our contributors addressed this issue directly, while others wrote on topics that might appear only tangentially related. However, this is an open forum, and you're all free to address or ignore our featured topics as you please.

I would just like to say a few words about the body in the Age of Communication. First of all, I am intrigued by the idea I hear more and more often that the computer will radically change our conception of the self. No doubt this is true. But where is the body in this new figuration of the self? It seems like the computer is the latest innovation in our long-standing cultural subordination of the human body to the mind. Those of you who now chronically suffer neck cramps and back pain, strained eyes, and sore wrists, all thanks to hours spent peering into flickering screens, will know exactly what I mean.

I am also suspicious of the argument that new communications technologies will liberate us from traditional identity categories and allow a free play to our multiple selves. I'm all for multiplicity in self-construction and self-expression. In fact, one of my pet political ideals is that people be allowed to adopt as many social roles, activities, subcultural identifications and lifestyles as they like, without being reduced to any one fixed category. However, the fact is that social identities are imposed externally, often according to our physical appearance, deployed by legal and political institutions along gender and racial and class lines and effectively maintained by convention, stereotype, violence, decorum, and "taste". This is a problem that virtual interactions will not address or dismantle since they evade the question of real bodies altogether.

The social sphere is where identities are enforced, and this is the terrain on which they should be contested and extended rather than on disembodied chatlines and MUDs. The Internet may be a great information resource, and e-mail is surely the best thing that's happened to long-distance friendships and professional contacts since the telephone, but I am not convinced that the computer is really a friend of the human body or the human mind.

Agnieszka Soltysik

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A slap in your interface

By Nicholas Palffy



If you think of yourself as a unity between body and mind, with a soul hidden somewhere in-between, you are not going to like this article.

The advent of information technology and the emergence of the computer is tearing apart our traditional ways of thinking about the body and the self. Nowadays, the PC embodies new ways of dealing with the world, exchanging ideas, and challenges our representations of ourselves. We are not what we think we are. It appears that we do not have a single coherent self but many personalities that are exchangeable, depending of the context. This is at least the main topic of Sherry Turkle's provocative book: *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. Professor of sociology of science at MIT and cyberspace conquistador, she investigates the ways people think about themselves and their worlds in these postmodern times. What is real? What is virtual? Of the many selves I am, who is the real me? Sherry Turkle places the computer as the latest technology that's allowing us a paradigmatic shift into a new dimension of being and relating to each other. As she says: "In term of technologies that

have really changed people's deepest conception of self, we've had a long run with print. Print has been a transparent medium for expressing a unitary self. But we're in the beginning of a profound shake-up of that sense of what a self is and what you take responsibility for and what you don't. ...When you can have an instantiation of your body on a computer – this is new."

Anyone can nowadays experiment with the lousy boundaries of the self in MUDs (multi-user dungeons) and online chatroom. With an IRC (Internet Relay Chat) program, you can talk to people you don't know, that you will never meet in reality, people that are thousands of kilometers away from you. It is as easy as logging in an IRC¹ channel, choosing an avatar, a representation of yourself and typing out who you are now. This persona can be a nickname, – in the most primitive chatrooms–, or a more complex and 3-dimensional image selected in a database. In cyberspace, your online persona is an artifact, a complete fiction, and the truth about it is that nobody will care about your

imposture. You can enjoy "being" a 16 year old-girl or a 55 year-old bus driver, –or just about any identity that comes to your mind– and safely play with any of these substitute identities, telling your many stories in a non-threatening environment. The acting-out of yourself, of your "self" as a bunch of interfaces is revolutionary –unlike your identification to a character in a book, which you never play out– and overall, it's fun. It is role-playing with a temporary identity. However, this disembodied and a-sensory way of communicating is opening up new dimensions –and raising serious questions– in the way we relate to each others in a culture of simulation. This is the postmodern situation: our multiple selves telling multiple stories to multiple audiences. What stories? What selves? At what cost? Sherry Turkle answers: "The goal of healthy personality development is not to become a One, not to become a unitary core, it's to have a flexible ability to negotiate the many – cycle through multiple identities". A logarithmic increase of being in a theater of text? Still, multiple personae are not going to dismiss the uniqueness of our physical body. So if computing presents us a new set of metaphors about the body (cybersex? hypertext dating?), the whole discussion for the next decade is certainly going to be around the "interfacing" of our body and our selves.

Sherry Turkle, Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet, Simon and Schuster, 1995.

1 Try Worldchat (Windows) in any Internet Café, it is an experience!

What are the limits of the human body? The question seems irrelevant at first: everybody has a sense of his/her own body and of the place it occupies in space. Everybody knows what the limits of the human body are. And shifting from common sense to common science in order to find a more elaborate answer would not prove more successful. With indeed almost the same matter-of-fact...ness as general opinion, the scientific discourse provides a description of the human body that verges on the tautological: its forms, according to it, are outlined by the physical structure of... the body. Considering such answers, that range from obviousness to tautology, we should then become convinced of the sheer absurdity of the question addressed initially.

I would nonetheless suggest that the issue should be investigated further. It is indeed necessary to bear in mind that the traditional answers that have just been presented are grounded (even that of common sense, however paradoxical this may seem) on a notion of the human body as a rather idealized abstract entity, i.e. as an entity totally cut off from its environment and, as such, easily encompassed. But in "real life" the human body looks quite different from its counterpart displayed on an anatomical chart. In "real life", i.e. in the world of social interaction, the human body can never be abstracted from the socioeconomic context which it is subjected to and that informs it. If both common sense and science seem to be blinded to this crucial distinction, what about literature? Let us then ask our initial question to Bessie Head's "Witchcraft" (a short story published in *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales*).

At the beginning of the text, it is said that in the Botswana village where the action takes place: "the only value women were given in

Remapping the Human Body

By Claude Meyer

the society was their ability to have sex; there was nothing beyond that" (p.49). Reduced to a single function, the female body becomes a sign whose meaning is fixed by the men. Or, similarly, it is treated as taking part in a male economy that establishes the value of the goods. Both readings are possible since, as it will soon become clear, the economy of discourse and the discourse of economy are combined by the men of the community in order to control the women's body. Confronted with this situation, Mma-Mabele, the main character, wishes to escape this power structure. Accordingly, she finds a job that enables her to challenge the patriarchal economy. Now earning money as a housekeeper, she is not anymore just a passive part of a system of exchange, she becomes an economic agent herself.

Of course, this is an oversimplification. By becoming an active member of the market, does Mma-Mabele actually reach independence? This is at least what the men of her village fear. Since Mma-Mabele's body is apparently escaping their economy, they have to try to regain control over it. In order to do so, they first use language. They call her "he-man", thus assigning to her a particular bodily identity. But the men, deprived of the actual sexual possession of her body, go a step further: they put a spell on her. The possession then moves from the symbolical to the physical.

Mma-Mabele, panic-stricken and wishing to get rid of the evil possession, rushes to the hospital. There she is examined and her illness is explained as a merely internal bodily dysfunction that can be healed by simply acting upon the physical cause. Western doctors, unlike traditional healers, do not pay attention

to the environment of the patient. They have a restricted notion of the human body that focuses only on its physical structure. On the contrary, the local healer who also proposes his services to Mma-Mabele, accounts for her health disorder in terms of a narrative involving the whole community, i.e. in terms of a narrative that does not confine the body to its physical boundaries but rather conceives it as part of a larger structure. Mma-Mabele, being looked after in a modern hospital, is simply advised to eat oranges.

Let us recapitulate. Mma-Mabele, while seeking to set her body free from patriarchal economy, becomes a member of the market and, as such, alienates her body in capitalist economy. Wishing then to be healed from sorcery, i.e. to have her body brought back to herself, as it were, she finds it diluted in a discourse that, in erasing all difference, pays no attention to its particular story. Caught in a traditional communitarian way of life or in modern capitalist economy, under the power of witchcraft or of science, Mma-Mabele's body is always possessed. It is always subjected to forces that control it and expand its limits.

Has this conclusion to be read as a kind of moral applicable to everyday life? I don't know. What is certain, however, is that issues like abortion, for instance, permanently reformulate the question of the limits of the human body since, in such cases, it becomes manifest that the body is not reducible to its physical dimension but is torn between different discourses (that of the women who claim that their body is theirs vs. that of the church which argues that it belongs to the Christian community). All of these discourses seek to define the limits of the body.

Autopsy of a Mémoire

By Anne Vandeventer

It is done. It is over. I thought it was something of the past. But I have been asked to say something about mémoire writing. I can't tell you how to do it, give you tricks or produce an infallible recipe, but I can tell you of my own experience and formulate a few tips.

The most difficult step is always the first. And this was also true of my mémoire. I spent weeks and months thinking about a proper topic. It needed to be very interesting, as I was going to carry it along with me for several months without getting tired of it. It needed to be large enough to have an abundance of ideas to be expressed about it. It needed to be restrained enough to remain manageable. And it needed to be accepted by a director. In my case, as I believe it often happens in the English Department, choosing a topic was also choosing a director. After a couple of talks about my ideas to my prospective director, I settled on a specific topic.

Then came the dreaded stage of the mémoire proposal. Yes, it is a lot of work. No, you don't need to have written the whole mémoire to be able to write the proposal. This infamous mémoire proposal must include, among other things, a detailed bibliography, and this, I must admit it, means that most of the research, if not all of it, is done before one starts working on the mémoire itself. But yes, there is still a lot of work to do after you hand in your proposal. In fact, putting my ideas on paper for the first time was an important step for me. It helped me clarify my thoughts on what I actually wanted to write about.

As for the writing of the mémoire itself, it went on quite smoothly once I had planned an efficient outline. I had first tried to do without, to write parts of chapters pertaining to the particular book I was studying (my mémoire is divided in chapters by themes or sub-topics rather than by authors or works), but I soon realized that this method would lead to

a lack of coherence in my chapters. I had to stop writing, study all my material and draft detailed outlines for each chapter. Then I started writing again, encountering much fewer difficulties.

Writing a long piece of work must always include some rewriting, some reworking of the material. Reading one's own work is part of the process of writing it. I did not find this an easy task. As I knew what I wanted to say, most of what I had written seemed

clear to me, but some of it appeared confused to outside readers. As a non-native English speaker, I did not discover the grammatical mistakes which were sprinkled in my text. As a writer, I was too interested in the content of my work to pay careful attention to typos and the such. I was lucky enough to have easily accessible proofreaders in my family circle, but trusted friends can render the same indispensable office. When it was time to hand in the first version of my manuscript, I knew it was not perfect. But it never

would be, therefore I could as well go ahead. To my great surprise, my director reviewed my mémoire in the record time of five short days. This disturbed my plans of a few quiet and restful weeks, but there was nothing to do but start working again, following the guidelines offered my director during an hour-long discussion of my work. Rewriting, in my case, involved adding, or completing, paragraphs in the whole text and not (simply) adding an extra chapter at the end. I did not find it easy and I was happy when it was over.

I was not particularly nervous when I proudly gave three clean copies of the second version of

my mémoire to my director. All my nervousness had been spent the day before when I left home with a unique copy of my manuscript, still provisional and private, to transform it into three bound exemplars of my mémoire, now definitive and ready for examination.

The last stage was the formal discussion of the mémoire. I started off by explaining why I had chosen my particular topic, what I had learned during the process, what I would try to do differently if I was ever to write a mémoire again. And then came questions and comments. As you certainly know it from other exams, it is not always easy to find quick answers, not to let a dreadful silence spread itself while you try to figure out what kind of reply is expected of you after a comment which did not actually contain a question. But an hour is a very short amount of time, and if I can tell you one thing, it is that you will feel a lot better once it is over.

I am not an specialist in mémoire writing (I have written only one so far), so I think I'll stick to banalities for advice. Think of your topic well in advance. Do not hesitate to talk to potential directors, they can give you interesting ideas and save you time by suggesting relevant books. How to write is very personal, so I won't say anything about it, but I strongly encourage you to find someone to proofread your mémoire. As for the discussion of mémoire, remember that when you reach that stage,

you have become an expert on your topic.

Good Luck!

•Anne Vandeventer wrote *Issei, Nisei, Nikkei: A Study of Japanese American's Allegiance to Countries and Cultures under the guidance of Professor Blair.*

Tongue is...

By Olga H el-Bongo

A strange title, definitely.

A distant echo, perhaps, of the stickers -fundamental to our childhood!- on which one could learn what LOVE IS... Tongue is... the bodily organ used for tasting or producing speech, as everybody knows. Tongue is... this organ taken from an animal, used as food. Tongue is... a spoken language, a mother tongue. Tongue is... the name of a tasty chapter in Michael Ondaatje's book: *Running in the Family*. If you have not read this book so far, please run! You will learn many practical things inside, such as the ways and means of becoming a great orator. Ondaatje tells us a Ceylonese myth that "if a child is given thalagoya tongue to eat he will become brilliantly articulate, will always speak beautifully, and in his speech be able to 'catch' and collect wonderful,

humorous information."(Running in the family,74). For your information, the thalagoya is a crocodile! That amounts to saying that a tongue (yours) eating a tongue (the crocodile's) will become an articulate tongue (yours, unless the crocodile eats you before!). Concerning the ways of eating the tongue, it is recommended that it "should be sliced off and eaten as soon as possible after the animal dies. You take a plantain or banana, remove the skin and cut it lengthwise in half, place the gray tongue between two pieces of banana making a sandwich, and then swallow the thing without chewing, letting it slide down the throat whole. Many years later this will result in verbal brilliance" (Running in the family, 74).

Now if you ask for my advice, I would answer you to taste the tha-

lagoya tongue and test your verbal skills afterwards with the following tongue twisters:

— If your tongue twitches and tingles, the twitching and tingling of your tongue teaches that tingling and twitching can be tedious. Too easy for you? Why not try this one:

— Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper. If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper, where's the peck of pickled pepper Peter Piper picked? I can hear you asking me a more poetical one. Fine.

— She sells seashells at the seashore. If she says the shells she sells are seashore shells, then the shells that she sells are seashore shells, I'm sure.

Tongue is... the articulated joint between body, language and literature.

Olga Hel-Bongo

Ondaatje, Michael. 1982. *Running in the Family*. Berkshire, Cox and Whitman Ltd, Reading.

Student Feedback

This year, the English department staff has collectively provided 2nd year students with a lecture series on the History of Literature in English. As promised in the Course Description, the lectures have focused on how "what counts as literature is constructed, amalgamated into 'traditions,' and altered over time." Each week has featured a different lecturer and topic, allowing students to experience the range of approaches among our teaching staff, as well as the range of concerns within the field of what may be called "histories of literature(s)."

Perhaps the best index of this series' success is its regular attendance by students. Our informal queries among students suggest

that you come out of curiosity and stay out of genuine interest. The only complaints we have heard have been of a purely technical nature, e.g. some speakers spoke too softly or too fast. Here are several more students responses, as recorded on March 12, 1996:

"At the beginning of the year, I found this lecture very different from what I was expecting, [which was] something more classic. But afterwards I really appreciated the structure of the lecture and I think it's up to us to choose what seems relevant or not. The fact that it is taught by several teachers brings a touch of variety. It fits the philosophy of the English department."

"It was most of the time rather complicated and difficult to understand because of the very specific subjects which were often unknown to me. Without knowing the discussed authors, it was often hard to follow those detailed lectures. It seemed too me that sometimes some speakers didn't consider our small knowledge of English Literature."

"Useful background info. Maybe not directly for an exam, but interesting none-the-less in order to acquire a global view of the literary world."

The Age of Fuzziness

By Nicholas Palffy

For centuries, typographers have spent hours to design alphabets that were meant to embellish the page by increasing readability, a decisive contribution to Gutenberg's revolution of print. The printed page was then carefully designed and the typesetting was based on the Golden Rule, a particularly well-balanced and harmonious format.

Today, the trend is to use alphabets that are blurred, fuzzy, shadowy, disfigured, and to lay out pages that look like battlefields. The letter is under attack. So what? Well, if we consider how typography uses metaphors of the body to describe its characters and the printed page (Headers reign on top, footnotes are under the scrutiny of the eye of the letter, and words run shoulder to shoulder in through the body of text...), are we reshaping our own cultural body when we alter alphabets and the readability of the page? And since the printed page have been the main territory of our "graphosphere" (a term coined by Regis Debray), what happens when the page is dispossessed from its header and footer, when good old plain text becomes hypertext? Are we losing our head and feet in cybersphere? What is then the medium in this messy age?



The messy age is the medium...

Hence, typography is still a decisive vector of meaning. So when the typographical alphabets of the world are being seriously altered, and the page layouts disorganized, meaning through readability is in danger. The ultimate "embellishment" of typography, the fuzzy typing-machine character, epitomizes the ambiguity between the perfection of the mechanical device and the indistinction of a blurred era that craves for meaning.

The question of form and readability is also relevant in the domain of the Human Body. The Human Body seems to be at the center of our reflections today. The alteration made to typography can be correlated with the alterations made to the body through genetical manipulation. By messing with our physiological alphabet, our DNAphabet, aren't scientists threatening our form and readability in the same way as the iconoclasts designers?

So far, the scientific discourse has been very cautious not to advertise openly what they are preparing in their test-tubes. But food has already started to be genetically altered. What you eat is not what you see. How do you recognize a genetically-altered tomato, besides the fact it will never going to rot?

This question of readability, literally of read-ability, seems to be central in our civilization. On the one hand, seemingly innocuous alterations to the readability of the page are seen as nothing but a trendy fashion, and it might be true in some respect. On the other hand, the body, -its representations, its modes of actualization in the world or more radically, its genes- is being under social and scientific

scrutiny. Like the chameleon-man played by Woody Allen in *Zelig*, both typography and the human body, the alphabets and our identity are in a process of reevaluation of their meaning(s). The readability of the letter and of the text is being interrogated not intrinsically (it is not the end of the word, just a kick to its form) just like the readability of the body is being publicly examined. Hence, if fuzziness is a representative trait of our actual typographical environment, can it also be a relevant image of our present culture? The real danger for us is certainly in not raising the question.

Library: Improvement but could still do better!

By Laure Saporta

As surprising as it might seem it finally happened: the opening hours of the English library have changed. Consider this as a revolution! For those who had not noticed, it is now opened from 9h. to 20h. from Monday to Friday and from 9h. to 13h. on Saturday. What a relief. If you too are one of those who cannot study at home don't hesitate, come to the library. You will not only be able to concentrate much better, there will be neither a phone ringing, nor a potentially good TV program to turn your mind off your work, and even the fridge will not tempt you anymore (not to mention the noisy neighbours you are still hesitating to kill), but instead you will get a chance to work in a quiet, peaceful environment and to meet some interesting people. Consider the library not only as a working prison but also as a socializing place: there you often meet people again you had not come across for a long time, you discover faces you never saw during the seminars, you have a chance to get into contact with more experienced students who can answer your questions and give you some advice...in other words the library enables you to make new friends. Think also how nice it is, when you need a break and can go for a cup of the excellent coffee (provided by our favorite coffee-machine) and instead of drinking it all by yourself, can share it with other bright students. Furthermore, as you probably have already realized, the essential tools to write really good essays are located in this very same library. Remember how assistants and professors love it when you quote passages of the OED. The only problem is that these great 20 volumes cannot be taken home. Once more the library opens its arms for you to go and consult this great work within

its walls. By now you should have understood that as a serious and competent student of the English department, you cannot possibly live without spending a certain amount of time in the library!

But let us now come back to the issue I want to deal with. Even though an effort has been made concerning the opening hours of our resource-full library, more needs to be done. Discussing with other students, it appeared that it would be welcome, especially in periods of exam preparation, to have broader timetables. Some of us have the chance to be very efficient early in the morning, and for those it is a loss of time to wait until 9 o'clock. If you have a seminar at 10h. and want to do some reading before, an hour is hardly enough. By the time you really get into the subject, the hour is already over. For the other "category" of students, those who are only productive in the evening, the same problem occurs. If their seminar ends at 18h. they first need a break to recover and digest what they have just listened to. Then they need to find all the books which they are willing to consult. By the time they will start it will be 18h45. and they'll have only one more hour left. It is then hardly worth starting. What I suggest is a system allowing us to use the library and its numerous resources from 8h. to 22h. from Monday to Friday and from 8h. to 18h. on Saturday. We all know that the finances of the University are not good, but there are certainly solutions. One of them would be to establish a kind of permanence which would be held by unpaid students. I am convinced that it would work. Last Saturday for example a student was working on his *mémoire* and regretted that he had to leave at 13h. He would have been ready to

stay all day. These cases occur more often than you might believe. Please do not think that there would be a risk of books disappearing. This would not happen, especially since a magnetic system is being installed and will alarm the rest of the building in case someone would try to appropriate a book. No, there are no reasons not to consider such a change.

It is obvious that this suggestion, if taken into account, would have to be discussed some more. Still, I am convinced that a fair amount of students would be ready to get involved in this project. The fact that the ETI library is now opened much longer only proves how necessary it is for students to have a possible access to their library. If we are supposed to be serious about our studies let us get a chance to work in order to do so.

P.S.: if you are interested by such a change, note that statistics of the library frequentation are held. It might therefore be worth showing up every now and then to show how useful such a change would be.

in Brief

- Regretted Departures
- *Ami Dykman will be leaving us to teach comparative literature at Penn State next year.
- *Roy Kay will teach English and critical theory at the University of Utah.
- *Roy Sellars will be at the Society of Fellows at Cornell.
- *Bernard Schlurick will teach as visiting professor in the Fall semester in the English department and in the Humanities center at Johns Hopkins.
- *Valeria Wagner is waiting to hear from the Fonds National.
- Several new assistants will be joining us next year. Details in our next issue.

Book review

L'Analyse Textuelle en Anglais: Narrative theory, Textual Practice

by Terence Hughes - Claire Patin

Students are rarely given the occasion to learn analysis of text together with a theoretical basis. In this very well done book, texts, relevant questions and examples of how to apprehend a text are presented in a clear and concise way. The notions of characters, setting, time, narrating agency and focalization are addressed in a learn-by-practicing way. Excerpts from Henry James to Patrick White are used to teach you how to handle the analysis.

A selected bibliography and a comprehensive index complete the book. It is the kind of book that is lacking in the English Department, especially for first and second year students that are not familiar with analysis of texts.

The book can be found at Payot.

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The ADEA is resurrected!

Happy news! We are glad to announce the resurrection of the ADEA (Association Des Etudiants En Anglais) after a painful absence. The new committee has been elected at the last General Assembly of the ADEA, which was held on April 23. Participation to the Assembly was poor, but we nonetheless managed to formally gather a bunch of students into an official committee.

The ADEA is the organisation that is in charge of representing and defending the students, providing information and organizing activities of various kind. The ADEA has decided to be active in several fields:

THE NEWSLETTER – We are working hard to set up a quarterly newsletter, to inform you of the lat-

est news of the English Department. But we need your participation, your help, your information and your talent.

THE THEATRE GROUP – Stephanie Durrleman, Treasurer and vice president of the ADEA is initiating a theatre group (see announcement below).

TUTORING – Depending on your interest, the ADEA might set up a permanence to help students deal with their essays, administrative problems, etc...

CINECLUB – We would like to screen films of interest to students of this Department, starting in November. All suggestions are welcome. Call Pedro Jimenez, 321 1611.

Student Questionnaires

In the next few days, when you arrive in your English seminar or lecture or TP, your instructor will give you a questionnaire and ask you to fill it out by the end of class. This questionnaire, a brainchild of the Commission mixte, will ask you to reflect on and respond to the course you've been following. Since you are answering anonymously, you can be as candid as you like. The purpose of this questionnaire is to allow the teaching staff of this department to receive a little feedback about their courses and their teaching, and to allow you to reflect on your experience of the course, and make suggestions. In any case, the editorial staff of Noted urges you to take advantage of this initiative on the part of the department for dialogue about pedagogical concerns and fill out the questionnaires as thoroughly and thoughtfully as time allows.

ADEA Theatre Group

Get with it!

You have seen posters on campus advertising the ADEA TheatreGroup. This group is more known yet for its posters than for its performances... It will actually stage itself during the academic year 1996-97. To ensure a quick start in autumn, joining before summer holidays is

desirable. The idea has been proposed to put on a satirical skit on the University in general and the English Department in particular. All interested are strongly urged to share their revealed or potential talents, be it acting, singing, dancing, writing, thinking... Call Stephanie Durrleman (738 76 12) for more info.