

WHEN BODIES COLLIDE

What happens when bodies—physical beings or conceptual objects—collide with one another? The essays in this section explore such collisions: what drives them and what the resulting impacts suggest about our culture.

In “So Close Yet So Far: Time-Space Convergence and the Prospect of a Global Village,” Mark Pires uses collisions of time and space to discuss the notion of an emerging global village. Pires questions “convergence” and “connection” and “global” and “village”; he then runs these ideas, and others, into each other. The result is a thoughtful consideration of planetary bodies—literal and metaphorical, individual and collective, and human and technological—as well as a critique of our received notions of progress.

In “Colliding Upward: Approaching Equity in the Superintendency,” Estelle Kamler focuses on individual, bounded bodies in the workplace. Using data from the field of educational administration, Kamler argues that our bodies’ markers—particularly markers of gender and “race,” or ethnicity—have historically correlated strongly with career paths and outcomes. Kamler establishes that career paths and outcomes for aspiring superintendents continue to track differently along lines of gender and ethnicity. She then presents data supporting a proactive approach to mentorship networks structured to produce equitable outcomes in educational administration. Thoughtful collision, Kamler shows, can change mentorship outcomes, replacing selective promotion and advantage with equal access for all bodies entering the field.

When what one wants (desire) and what one gets (result) diverge, how does one determine what’s gone wrong? Simone Weil Davis proposes that the desire for contact often results instead in collision; she asks that we consider collisions of various kinds as life-affirming impulses gone off course or crashed. The first scene in “Crash: Collision and Contact” is an actual car wreck; Davis then drives us through, among other things, boxing, 70s TV, NASCAR racing, Princess Di’s limo, and the work of artist Carlos Almaraz. Along the way, Davis builds a case—a wish, she calls it—that we might less often collide with, and more often contact, who and what we are trying to touch.

Nicholas Ramer, on the other hand, seeks exactly the collision of bodies in “Simulating the Collision of β -Poly(vinylidene fluoride) with Infrared Light.” Discussing this carefully simulated collision, which runs on software, Ramer writes: “Our vibrational frequencies are in very good agreement with both the experimental and semi-empirical values,” and elsewhere notes for us the value of the information to be gained from such simulations, and the real-world applications of such information in improving and developing devices like SONAR. In Ramer’s case, collision is not to be avoided; it is to be created where it does not “really” exist for our benefit.