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## The Body Matters

The simplest form of power is that derived from  
a man's own body.  
(Canetti 1984, 390)

There is always repression when someone stands between the body and the world. There, where the body's link with the world is mediated, there is always a regime of coercion (whether it is merely microscopic or the most platitudinous of regimes).

Political repression, transformed in the system's ubiquitous rule, radicalizes the body.

Radicalized political repression, its escalation, incandesces the body and temporarily effaces the individual layers and cultural accumulations for the body, characteristic of "the peaceful life," i.e., for a more balanced model of ruling the state.

The resisting body will constitute the group and all of its phenomena – the insurrection, the revolution, the warfare, the protest, the rally, will set a situation of temporary abolishment of the social hierarchy inside and outside the

very group. But these are not bodies capable of living together. These are merely bodies akin to and synchronic in their resistance.

The entire enormous cultural history, the enormous construct of culture is being temporarily abolished and reduced to the body. It is not expressed by or through the body. It is temporarily *sublated*, abolished, suspended, and driven aside. The body matters. The unexpectedness of its action makes it *visible*.

The body's visibility is a visibility of the body for the thinking itself. The body is being secondarily assimilated within the registry of a revolutionary-bodily and artistically-bodily culture, but this is a secondary signifying practice of the body. It becomes visible precisely when it enforces that it be thought.<sup>1</sup> In this way, it entails a "language" or a "culture." But in fact, it – alone besides itself and for itself – does not create anything beyond its immediate physical acts. The creation of culture will be ascribed to it secondarily, from the observer's position – the consciousness that thinks it. In relation to the very act, in the moment of the very act we could say that the body is in full silence – it always remains outside language,

and its act could, secondarily, be simultaneously attached to different and even contradicting political and artistic cultures.

The body creates no culture, the body acts. This is all it can do.

By opening spaces of thinking, the body brings to realization the sublation under question and thus creates a temporary topos. Yet, topos is too strong an expression – the body does not realize any utopian project. It has itself no plan, in the sense of a preliminary program. Even if there is such a plan, the body itself does not relate to it. Even utilized as an instrument, even set in the position of a doer, the body always has the final word. There, where the body advances and makes an act, it realizes exactly “its” act and nothing else. We will ascribe it to the subject secondarily. (The subject is the helping leash to which we will tie the bodies (proper or alien) – in order to simultaneously feel related to them, to make them tolerable and possible for thinking and to hold them under control). The body itself overcomes itself and in this overcoming it is all alone – from invisible it becomes exhibited to gazes, *it becomes vulnerable*. In this overcoming of the internal limit, the body is all alone – it makes a leap. In a body (from the position of situatedness in it), everything can be thought, but it itself can do some things with ease, and others with much effort or altogether cannot. Various bodies have different external limits, they border with the external in various ways.

The body achieves visibility by displacement from the Real. The body “makes” a place “for itself,” but one cannot say that it creates a new place or occupies an already existing place. This is *momentum*, a lightning’s shine,

under which the body is seen for a moment. In this sense, what is important is the act through which the body makes itself flashing and becomes visible. The act creates a momentary resonance between body and thinking. Thus the body achieves visibility. The body does not occupy someone else’s place (on the contrary, it is precisely in this moment that it is “in its place”), and flashes as the Other of places.

The subject could be merely the body’s fuel, but during the act, in the moment of the very act the subject is being suspended and dis-placed. The body is not a subject and is not the subject. It is a “body-that-is-responsible-for-itself.”

Can we here talk about a reduction and where does this reduction take place? We will “reduce” the body in order to think about it clearly. However, no reduction takes place by the body. At the moment of action, the body is as if only seemingly reducing itself to this action. But if there is reduction, some resource has diminished, some energy has not been in use, the whole is represented by a part. This is why we would say: the body is action, or, more precisely: the body acts. It all is radicalization, and is not reduced to it. It all is radicalized, because it is a doer. We say a “doer” only to elucidate: in fact, it is not even this – the body is a *doing*. (This “doing” is the main feature of the living body, which separates it from objects). Because of this, it has no need to think itself. And again due to the same reason it is responsible for itself – it itself puts itself in danger.

The body that has achieved visibility exists parallel to the hierarchy, but also outside of it. For itself, the body matters in only one way – physically, through its “unsigned vivacity.” This vivacity is material, and no other.

For the body, the only way out of repression is through *direct physical actions*.

In this sense: the body is resistance. The body is not interested in or by culture. The body is resistance through its necessity to advance.

Being invisible and indiscernible, the body is convenient and hospitable to the repression. Becoming visible, achieving visibility, the body resists. The body does not merely resist, the body *is* resistance. This is its other stable characteristic. It cannot but resist. It cannot but do. Because of this, resistance is not by all means a reaction to an external repression, it is inseparable from and inherent in the body.

The body temporarily abolishes culture, and through its resistance it bears witness to a disastrous situation in the political, a political in disaster (*anomie* or hypertrophy of the empowered class – authoritarianism or totalitarianism, i.e., dictatorship). The body temporarily abolishes culture (brushes away, takes away, deprives us of normativity), but through its resistance (which is a visibly active deed, and we can also say: production) it brings signifying practice, it generates meaning – and thus creates space. On the one hand it takes away, but at this very moment – by the opposite logic – it produces, it opens some new space to be thought.

Through its act, the body sublates everything in its own plane. And this “sublation” is thrusting back and producing at the same time. It functions in this duplicity, which does not always attain equilibrium.

The body speaks about political repression without the repression being visible. Once the body achieves visibility,

it automatically makes repression visible. We have to say: once advancing, the body begins to speak immediately. We will say: *the body takes a stand*.

If the body is a ceaseless “flow of desiring-production,” then politics and culture are the ceaseless “re-territorialization” of this flow, and in this sense they are reactive, the attempt to collect and seal off the body and thus they remove themselves from and deaden it.

There is no need for the very repression to be visible. It can also be quite discrete. We need not see beaten bodies, the blood, the hunger and misery, the exhausted refugees or the corpses in order to understand that it is there. Moreover, a peculiarity of repression is that its proficiency – the immediate physical proficiency, its experiencing – is hard to communicate, it is by its essence as equally invisible as the body itself is. And it is invisible because it can be thought of merely once it has happened. And it is invisible secondly because, even if discussed, broadcast or narrated, it continues to remain invisible for the body which does not know it. It is for this reason that it is not *directly* communicated, it knows how it evade. Repression always precedes the political visibility of the body. I do not protest every single day and I do not ‘explode’ myself every day, on the other hand: I eat every day, I sleep and defecate, but my body stays invisible (even to myself). A third stable characteristic of the body is its invisibility.

What do we call radicalization of the body? This is the moment when the body has begun to act by itself, it has itself grown aware of itself as a body-responsible-for-itself. This is the moment when the body stops receiving the repression, regardless if it comes from a political

apparatus or from the one who thinks inside the body itself (“its” subject).

The very fact that the body has radicalized, that it has found itself in the political, has begun to act is already evidence for some repression, no matter what the body does exactly. (Whether I fall at the feet of a political representative crying or if I stand alone in front of four tanks, this secures a different visibility for my body, but in both cases it points to something that precedes my act and this something is repression in some form.)

The body presupposes repression, it always contains it immanently. Through its resistance, it points at it and makes it visible. Since resistance is its stable characteristic, the body is being ascribed an invitation for repression. One can easily misuse it. The oppressor will say: “it (the other’s body) challenges me.”

The body in disaster (including the body of insanity or frenzy) attempts to shake itself free from the repression, to which it is subjected. Alone by itself, it does not deal with the generation of signs or images. Its primary meaning is the *shaking off* of repressive and restrictive interference – get out of my way, get away from my back, untie yourself from my neck! Secondly, this shaking off generates some signifying practice.

We cannot say of the body that it has remained alone/naked/unsigned – it is such. We are the ones who continually see from its own place something else. The body turns out to be the thing most strenuous to watch. It is namely the body that we will always hurl in the periphery, will “represent” it, will dress it, will add value and meaning to it. We will seek avenues to it in order to inscribe it

in a common frame of reference – we will ascribe subject to it in order to absorb it. Yes, the body achieves visibility, but this visibility of the body is by necessity (by our necessity – of those who think it alongside) merely a momentarily one – we are not able to bear more than a momentary body flash.

The body alone is by itself alone/naked/unsigned/non-meaning. This crucial non-practice of signification of the body is impossible to absorb. It presents a challenge for both the thinking-that-found-itself-in-a-body which builds (or tries to build) certain relations with “its own” body, and the political which, due to this initial non-practice of signification of the body, will easily treat it as insignificant.

By itself, the body is non-signified, because it does not think – it knows and it acts.

It, the body, is in no need to matter, probably it is just exasperated, it is in distress for one reason or another, it creates and labors because it cannot but produce. It is unproductive that it is being thought of only from the position of a logo-centric colonialism. The body correlates with the things only by virtue of its own scale.

This is why it is not the mastered signifying practice that is the aim of the *corporeal act*, it has not thought of itself in advance. In this sense, the body has not “corpographed” itself (has not choreographed itself, has not in advance left outside the schema of its own act), it is a body-responsible-for-itself – it incessantly responds to the repression it cohabitates with and which incessantly faces it with its own limit. The ultimate repression, the pressure of the externally coming transforms the body in the only limit of

resistance, in the last bastion regardlessly. Every externally coming repression constructs it as an *external limit*. The internally coming repression – the illness, mental or physical, sets the *internal limit* of the body.

The body resists *by necessity*, its resistance is immanent. It is precisely the necessity that makes the body visible. It gives it temporary access and belonging to all the remaining events in human history and culture. It is not driven by concept or premeditated plan. It does not insist on receiving attention or some value that it contains. Its values stems from what it thrusts back. Here, it is not a matter of signs, but of a real threat, really operating a regime of repression. The body itself does not interfere in some system of signs, it does not implement an utterance, it does not think. It makes a certain act. Its value (its signifying practice and its visibility) stems from the thrusting back of repression. The body's act is opposition (to repression) and simultaneously the self-affirmation (of the own vivacity).

To speak of “body culture” means to be misled. The body is precisely what culture fails to appropriate, although it tries to by all possible means. There, where we would search for “body culture” we will come upon a self-repressive model. The flow of actions has transformed into territoriality. Or, more precisely, the body's lines of resistance and flight are being transformed into territorializations of ceaseless resistance as the norm of some group. The body's resistance is being assimilated by normativity and is localized in the socius – there it is (re) produced and maintained.

A body that gets accustomed to the challenges of its external limits often discovers its resistance as a “means

by itself” (as something due and belonging to it). And here it brings itself to a moment of *narcotization* with it itself – it creates for itself an extreme stereotype, it needs to be in disaster even when there is no disaster. When there is no real repression, it will frequently be provoked and intentionally sought for. In this sense, the narcotization could also be literal (bringing the body to its external limit), but it is mostly the stiffing of resistance to stereotype, i.e., its acceptance as a singular possible modus of the body, its singular language and expressionism.

A body closed in repetition itself hides itself. And it hides because it gives away its autonomy at the expense of repetition – a self-detached sustainable model, belonging to the socius and its dynamics. By resistance, the body is able to act suddenly. Suddenness is what outlines it.<sup>2</sup>

Through its acts of resistance, recalled by necessity and making it sudden (*viz.*, visible), the body's visibility becomes thinkable also in the moments when it is at rest, in everyday routine, in calmness. Maintaining the limit of resistance in the modus of everyday and quotidian action assists to the creation of a zone of visibility and the utterly muted modes of the body. In this case, resistance is emancipatory, its decisiveness – muted. A line of self-determination or discrete self-reclaiming of the body within the repression grows visible to us – not by the political repression, but by the very possibility for closure and disappearance of the body – the own absence (the body's physical end, its becoming-object) transformed into the body's external limit. In other words, through its acts of visibility, the body itself ceaselessly reclaims itself from its own absence (the object). It is in this way that the body discovers itself as *presence*.

But let us repeat again: nobody speaks here of some signful presence of the body. We are not speaking of the body's absence *to us* (someone's consciousness that observes alongside), nor absence *for us* and our thinking (decoding the body as a sign and the deciphering of its supposed message). Becoming conscious of its resistance, the body itself becomes conscious for itself – it itself becomes visible to itself. It will discover itself as *presence-in-itself*.

But these territories that are hidden to us do not abolish the necessity of resistance – repression is possible and happens on all levels. It simply modifies and leads to other forms of resistance, forms that seemingly “plunge” (into the body), while at the same time they operate on micro-surfaces and demand minimal twitches and miniaturized movements. The catatonic and autistic bodies are also bodies of resistance.

It does not follow from all that has been said so far that the body is *reactionary*. Yes, it responds to an external which lays the body for itself as a limit, but it is also not deprived from a sideways gaze. The body's gaze is not some defamiliarized instance, it is not a consciousness that thinks the thoughts we think the body with. The body's gaze is *its very vivacity*. The vivacious body is the body directly related with itself. The vivacious body is a body that sees itself. In this sense, it is *self-reflexive*. This only means one thing – resisting, *the body is itself able to enjoy*. It is capable of presencing in its acts and thus to learn to reload itself, to regenerate, to whirl its energy into a flow and to communicate – with nothing other than precisely its energy flow. The body's action is always “inscribed on the very surface of the Real.”<sup>3</sup> It is merely on a secondary level that this flow is the self-same *utterance* of the body, what it “says.”

And the body is bound to protect itself precisely at this point of potential action, where it sees only itself and is itself free to enjoy with no recourse to the colonizing measure of thinking. Otherwise, it will always remain in the position of the *irrational leftover* of immanently repressive and rational power and will model itself from this position. By the same token, it will always remain the *irrational leftover* of the authoritarian and arbitrary subject. Due to the ceaseless drive it has to be included, it will *by necessity* be able to alone identify itself only as excepted, as an exception.

Translated from Bulgarian by Stanimir Panayotov

#### Notes:

1. In the words of Walter Benjamin: “There is no world of thought that is not a world of language and one sees in the world what is preconditioned by language” (quoted in Weber 2008).
2. “Who prides himself on standing upright, can also, while remaining in the same place, sit, lie, squat or kneel. All these postures, and particularly the change from one to another, have their own special significance. ... All changes of position and relatively sudden. They may be familiar, expected, and in accordance with the customs of the particular community, but there is always the possibility of a change of position which is unexpected and therefore all the more significant” (Canetti 1984, 387).

In this text we accept that the body is “invisible” in all of its manifestations that are close and expected and that get rightly inscribed in the customs of a given community. We consider that then it is being immediately reduced to sign in a concomitant system of normativity and codifications, that it is being immediately covered by something else and does not speak alone of itself (through its unsignified vivacity).

3. “The recordings and transmissions that have come from the internal codes, from the outside world, from one region to another of the organism, all intersect, following the endlessly ramified paths of the great disjunctive synthesis. If this constitutes a system of writing, it is a writing inscribed on the very surface of the Real: a strangely polyvocal kind of writing, never univocalized, linearized one; a transursive system of writing, never discursive one; writing that constitutes the entire domain of the ‘real inorganization’ of the passive syntheses, where we would search in vain for something that might be labeled the Signifier” (Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 39).

#### References:

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