Body between Materiality and Power

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Essays in Visual Studies

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

THE BODY BETWEEN MATERIALITY AND POWER

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NASHELI JIMÉNEZ DEL VAL

In Western thought, the body has historically been a trope through which the relationships between internal/external, subject/object, nature/culture, and inclusion/exclusion become crystallized. For Western forms of knowledge, the body has been at the core of religious and philosophical discourses on what it means "to be human". The body, its expressions and emanations, its relation to nature, and its cultivation all point to its centrality in philosophical explanations of the human experience. As Darryll Grantly and Nina Taunton have argued, the body has consistently been at the very core of European discourses on humanism:

> whether in respect of the human form in art, or the body as material for self-fashioning, as a source of metaphor, as a commodity of exchange, as a powerful dimension of gender conflict, as a site of contention over sexuality, as a source of political or magical power, or as a signifier of otherness, to name but a few facets of this potent focus of cultural discourse.[1]

Hence, the body has been constructed as a site for competing discourses of the body as "identifications of forms of knowledge unique to the early modern period"[2] and beyond.

The present volume is an edited collection of essays in visual studies on the body, its materiality, and the power relations that determine it. The book focuses on these three core theoretical concepts with the aim to forward an interdisciplinary analysis of the relationship between body, materiality, and power, and the visibilities and invisibilities that result from this ever-shifting relationship. The volume's approach to the body, which takes into account the power relations that traverse it and the materiality that constitutes it, attempts to disarticulate more longstanding conceptualizations of the body in terms of the body/soul-mind dichotomy. Rather than perpetuate this long-established duality, the essays in this

volume aim to evidence the constructedness of the body/soul-mind binary by providing an alternative analytical framework that questions the division of the body into competing parts that are often thought of as two points of tension in perpetual contradiction with each other. Rather, one of the basic tenets of this volume is that the body functions more as an integrated whole that oscillates between its material condition and the interior and exterior power networks that traverse it.

In sum, the present introduction aims to provide an overview of the conceptual categories that have determined philosophical and sociological understandings of the body throughout history, all the while linking these categories to matters of visuality and visibility. With this aim in mind, the introduction will first briefly discuss a genealogy of Western conceptions of the body, while emphasizing the links between materiality and power in this discussion. The text will then focus on the possibility of thinking a "decolonial body" within the paradigm of the body as materiality and power. And finally, this chapter will set out the general structure of the volume according to the thematic sections that the book is divided into.

A Brief Genealogy of the Body in Western Thought

The body has been a recurring trope for thinking about the human condition in Western philosophy. During the classical era, the body was frequently discussed as a core symbol that functioned as a metaphor for societal organization; in fact, the body—or the classification of certain types of bodies in particular—was a functioning symbol to the degree that it marked the limit between the citizen and the slave. Following an Aristotelian viewpoint, the body was a locus of enunciation surrounding the nature of slavery, as the Greek philosopher argued in his *Politics*:

> Without a doubt, Nature wishes to establish a difference between the bodies of the freeman and of the slave, making the latter stronger for servile labour and the former useless for such activities, but useful for political life. […] And doubtless if men differed from one another in the mere forms of their bodies as much as the statues of the Gods do from men, all would acknowledge that the inferior class should be slaves of the superior. […] It is clear, then, that some men are by nature free, and others slaves, and that for these latter slavery is both expedient and right.[3]

Stronger bodies were therefore associated with servile labour, while more cultivated, refined bodies became identified with the lives of freemen. In short, as Antonello Gerbi suggests, "heartiness [was] a stigma of predisposition for slavery and a weak constitution an indication of natural

freedom".[4] Consequently, the visibility and muscularity of the othered body were the easiest signs for recognising a body's superiority for hard labour, but its inferiority for political rule. In this view, it was the very materiality of the strong body that predisposed it for material toil, while more "delicate" bodies were conceived of as directly political, that is, as clearly suited to participate in the political organization of the state. Hence, the link between the body, its materiality, and the exercise of power was established early on in the corpus of Western thinking.

In early Christian thought, the body and its materiality further served to establish an allegorization of the mystical body of Christ. In Pauline conceptualizations of the Christian body, a parallel was drawn between the human body and the early organization of the Christian church; in Saint Paul's words, "as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ".[5] Furthermore, the allegory of the mystical body of Christ was projected into early Christian cosmology as the Christian hemisphere of the *orbis terrarum* understood as a representation of the body of Christ: "the head is in heaven, upward, to the orient, as in Arab and medieval cartography. The arms point to the north and south, showing the ecumenical dimension. The feet indicate the unknown occident, the inferior and, of course, hell".[6] In this worldview, the human body itself was, in many instances, considered an earthly imitation of the Christological body. Hence, the body served as *the* conceptual node for the organization of a series of knowledges predicated upon the materiality and whole-part relations evoked by the human body.

At the crux of these theories were the classical and medieval philosophical traditions that conceived the body and the soul as two distinct yet interdependent entities. In early modern philosophy, the two existed under a struggle for predominance. As Jonathan Sawday summarizes, in this view "the body's gross physicality could ensure the endless enslavement of the soul to corporeal existence, defined, in the soul's terms, as punishment",[7] while the movements of the soul involved the potential "destruction of its temporary and temporal residence".[8] Thus, the body was understood as "one half of bifurcated whole" and, therefore, could never be considered a completely "discrete entity".[9] In short, during the Renaissance it was believed that the body's main function was to give material expression to the movements of the soul, whereby a clear hierarchy had been established in favour of the soul.

Yet the favouring of the soul in European theology and philosophy, far from existing as a coherent set of discourses, ran in parallel to explorations on the interiority and disarticulation of the body. In other words, the

materiality of the body was also at the core of philosophical conceptualizations of what it means to be human. In early Christian and early modern discourses, God's flesh was in itself textual, "a text written upon with universal characters, inscribed with a language that all men could understand since it was a language in and of the body itself, independent of any particular forms of speech".[10] In the search for this inscribed text, early modern iconography particularly emphasized the bodily interior. As described by David Hillman, "Christ's wounds, blood, heart, bowels became a near-obsessive topic, [as were] numerous late medieval and early modern stories of the incorruptible innards of saints and the images literally inscribed on their hearts".[11] This went hand in hand with a European tradition of "social and symbolic practices of piecing out the body in the early modern period"[12] that included dismemberment as corporal punishment, the pictorial representation of body parts in religious iconography, and the proto-scientific categorization and early anatomizing of the body.

These different modes of representing the body reflect at least two distinct types of European discourses on bodiliness. On the one hand, Mikhail Bakhtin has argued that in a classical aesthetic, the borderlines separating the body from the world were sharply defined, and the body was represented as a whole, closed entity. The body was perceived as all surface, a "closed individuality"[13] that did not merge with other bodies. In contrast, what Bakhtin terms the body grotesque was ambiguous, hideous and formless, all open cavities that merged it into the outside world.[14] For Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Bakhtin's "classical body denotes the inherent form of the high official culture [while the] grotesque […] designates the marginal, the low and the outside from the perspective of a classical body situated as high, inside and central by virtue of its very exclusions".[15] Thus, the body grotesque functions on a basic principle of degradation; in this sense, the body grotesque enacts a "lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract"[16] by transferring bodily substance back to a purely material level. The body grotesque—a chaotic mixture of human-animal, inside-outside—highlights the ambivalent and contradictory values latent in the use of the body as a categorical point of departure for establishing classifications in the relationship between the self and the world.

In the early modern context, within which artists were attempting to incorporate "the entire scientific culture of their epoch",[17] the accurate portrayal of human proportions was a reflection of the view that the human body was analogous to the perfection of nature. In this sense, following Panofsky, the Renaissance theory of human proportions was a

type of discourse related to the modern conceptualization of a "pre-established harmony between microcosm and macrocosm".[18] In short, the body was the organizational principle for developing particular forms of Western knowledge about the world, albeit through a purely Christological conceptualisation or through a proto-scientific approach to nature. Through the "hierarchy of outer-inner, core and shell, depth and superficiality [which are] the paradigms which shape the [Western] epistemological model",[19] the interior of the human body was at the centre of a discursive change that shifted from the conceptualization of the interior as the "ontological site of belief"[20] to an emerging understanding of it as an "epistemological site of growing medical and anatomical knowledge".[21] These two modes of knowledge conflicted within the body's interior, for one implied the negation of the other.

Furthermore, the paradoxical duality of body and soul was part of the belief that virtue and sin literally inhabited bodily viscera in a quasi-textual sense: the virtues and sins of an individual would become inscribed in his interior organs.[22] Thus, this "drive to access the interior of the body of the other" was motivated by the belief that the "entrails [were] where the other's innermost truth [was] imagined to be located", making the body interior "a decisive place [for] the comprehension of subjectivity".[23] A penetration to the depths of the body was practiced in response to a growing curiosity to know human nature. Artists were no longer "compelled to illustrate the body from outside, but now comprehended the inner principles of the body's construction".[24] An artist's capacity to reproduce the visible interior design of the body also aspired to imitate metaphysical *disegno*, in the context of an episteme that equalled the artist to God in both their capacities for metaphysical creation. In this sense, the capacity to achieve pictorial representations of the body imitated "God's original moment of creation in all its detail".[25]

However, other understandings of the body-interior revealed a much more conflictive relationship between the inside and the outside. If the body-interior was understood as a Bakhtian grotesque and the seat of sin, then the direct encounter with this interior "revealed a vista of an alternative (and dangerous) mode of existence in which the marginal, the low, the antirationalistic, reigns supreme. This, then, was the new battlefield in which the body-soul struggle was now to take place".[26] To go inside the body meant to "undertake a journey into a corrupt world of mortality and decay; it became a voyage into the very heart of the principle of spiritual dissolution".[27]

The first frontier towards the interiority was that of the skin. The trope of the *écorché* (the flayed body) was frequent in anatomical illustrations of

the period. In these depictions, the human subject has been dissected, his skin removed, but he is animated, he gives "the impression of still being alive".[28] This signalled the conceptualisation of the skin as "a protective but removable covering".[29] However, that did not mean that the skin was considered useless. In fact, the human subject, "skinned and faceless" became an anonymous body, his identity once carried in the skin now destroyed, making him "a nameless *écorché*".[30]

The shift in the representational regimes of the period resulted, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, in a "pictorial art [that] featured more and more representations of flayed bodies".[31] In all likelihood a development from early modern practices of dismembering and evisceration in religious contexts, the recurring depictions of bodily interiors during this period are evidence of a turn in the episteme. A newfound medical curiosity impelled the scholars of the time to search for further truths *within* the body. These typifications responded to a well-established hierarchy of the outer and the inner, of the limits between the core and the shell: "depth and superficiality [became] the paradigm which [shaped] the epistemological model not just in the Renaissance but also of modern science".[32] Hence, truth was understood as something lying within the body, "in the interior, hidden by a surface sheath, which one [had] to penetrate".[33]

Within the epistemic shift of the early Enlightenment, the body entered the "domain of the careful gaze", through which empirical vigilance was "receptive only to the evidence of visible contents".[34] Hence, the function of the gaze was to render the body "transparent for the exercise of the mind".[35] In this context, the skin became a veil. It was a covering of the body that responded to the inner movements of the soul with all the poetic implications of the fluidity of movement and ethereal potentiality of the veil. Yet, the veils that covered the body in this conception of interior-exterior were, as such, to be removed by the budding clinical gaze of the European proto-scientist. Rationality, and its corresponding production of a body of knowledge, gave rise to practices through which "the opening of the human body was considered a central act in the obtainment of knowledge".[36] Hence, the body's secrets and its grotesque nature became "the objects of a reifying science, one that turned corporeal insides into a visible spectacle".[37] For Foucault, this *penetrating* gaze moved from the vertical, the symptomatic surface, to the depths of the body, "plunging from the manifest to the hidden".[38] As such, anatomical knowledge became a practice of transformation from opaqueness to transparency. In Foucault's words, "knowledge *develops* in accordance with a whole interplay of *envelopes*; the hidden element takes on the form and rhythm

of the hidden content, which means that, like a *veil*, it is *transparent*".[39] As in the Renaissance aesthetic, the veil on the surface of the body became the body in veils, its transparency bringing the observer closer to the unveiling of the soul.

In other words, the "concrete individual [was opened up] to the language of rationality".[40] For Sawday, the best example of this in visual discourses was the genre of anatomical paintings popular during the seventeenth century. These, he claims, had as their primary objective, "to proclaim the absolutely unambiguous subjection of the mortal body to scientific and political power".[41] Anatomical dissection, and its corresponding portrayal through visual texts, was a potent reminder that "the remnant of a deviant 'will', a potential threat to the social fabric [could be] mastered by rational power",[42] for the threat he presented to "the moral fabric of the social order" had to be subjected to "the most extreme and rational violence".[43] For anatomical dissection was not "a delicate separation of constituent structures";[44] it epitomised "the violent and extreme side of curiosity: discovery by destruction".[45]

The body was also an effective a symbol of order and harmony between the human and the divine in early modern Western thought and, consequently, it became a representation of social and political organization as expressed by the concept of the body politic. The body was a recurrent metaphor for political organization and social integration in texts such as Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651) and others. In Hobbes's conceptualization, one colossal symbolic body was "taken to stand for a group of diverse bodies",[46] where each body part exercises a specific function that contributes to societal cohesion and functioning:

> For by art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE (in Latin, CIVITAS), which is but an artificial man, though of greater stature and strength than the natural, for whose protection and defence it was intended; and in which the sovereignty is an artificial soul, as giving life and motion to the whole body.[47]

In this view, the soul's reign over the physical body was analogous to the king's sovereignty within the state and to God's power within the universe in a "triple bond of authority".[48] Hence, the body in Hobbesian terms established a discursive link between the body material and the "best constitution of monarchical government".[49] If man's state in nature "is in 'continual fear' and in 'danger of violent death' and the quality of his life is summed up with the words 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short'",[50] then only his incorporation into the Leviathan (society) can save him from this brutish state. The body politic based itself on a metonymical rhetoric

that was as inclusive as it was exclusive. As Moira Gatens affirms, those who cannot provide the appropriate political forfeit to become integrated into this body are excluded because they are "defined by mere nature, mere corporeality, and they have no place in the semi-divine political body except to serve it at its most basic and material level".[51] The body politic thus functioned as a symbolic in-*corp*-oration of the individual into social life through monarchical political authority.

Yet even as the body serves to represent social relationships, and the body politic is "a way to establish the 'natural' interrelation between individuals and institutions",[52] the trope of the body politic does not imply a full sanitization or abstraction of the body from its material dimension. As Linda Nochlin argues, the king was, ultimately, the representative of the body politic and, therefore, "the fleshly embodiment of the State",[53] in the sense that he was power made pure physicality. Moreover, in many cases the force of the king's power was made visible precisely through graphic displays of power actioning on the body, in a potential and highly spectacular inscription of violence on bodily surfaces.

The antecedents for this relationship between power and materiality are clear. As Bakhtin has contended with respect to medieval and early modern culture, the exercise of power in battle was expressed through scenes in which the inverted logic of the "inside out" was visually expressed by pictures of opened bodies lying on the ground and surrounded by entrails.[54] The knight of lore was seen as a systematic "anatomizer" that dismembered and transformed human bodies into "minced meat",[55] in what Bakhtin has called the relation between "a [European] fighting temperament (war, battles) and the kitchen".[56]

During the *Ancien Régime*, the body of the condemned was tortured, dismembered, amputated, symbolically branded on the face or shoulder, exposed alive or dead to public view.[57] As Foucault suggests, the body functioned as the major target of penal repression and its marks were the evidence of the sovereign's power to allow or disallow life.[58] For Daniel Punday, Foucault treats the normalized body as a spatial "site" because normalization depends on space to order and differentiate individuals.[59] Bodily spaces are "inscribed" by power and the body functions as the site of power *par excellence*.[60] Hence, through violent inscription the material dimension of the effects of power were so symbolically amplified that the transit from flesh to meat was one that necessarily passed by the sword or the gallows. In this sense, the imbrication between power and materiality was a necessary condition for the due exercise of power in the European context.

As Foucault clarifies, however, such displays of sovereign power soon became counterproductive in their aim to control a population through a spectacularly punitive system of governance.[61] He stresses that the power deployed in the spectacular punishment of the condemned man would eventually become invested with popular practices and result in the overturn of the ritual of public execution.[62] As Foucault explains, it became frequent for disturbances to take place around the scaffold and for expressions of sympathy for the condemned man to be proclaimed. These popular practices fed into episodes of momentary saturnalia during which "rules were inverted, authority mocked and criminals transformed into heroes".[63] Hence, the need to implement subtler and more controlling forms of power to inscribe on the body became paramount. For John Tagg, the body itself was—and continues to be—invested by power relations through which it is situated in a certain "political economy", trained, supervised, tortured if necessary, forced to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs. Power is exercised in, and not just on, the social body because, since the eighteenth century, power has taken on a "capillary existence".[64]

Towards a Decolonial Body

While the above authors have theorized the body as a crucial trope for the understanding of Western epistemic traditions, other scholars have focused on the links between Occidentalizing constructions of the body in relation to the colonial and imperial projects of modernity. In historical colonial discourses, the body of the other was constructed as a site for valorisation, be it of its material value in terms of labour supply, its aesthetic value as an object of representation, its ethical value as a mark of innocence or degradation, or its erotic value as an object of desire.[65] In this sense, the colonial body was considered "the object of examination, commentary, and valorisation" to the extent that it was "the body, rather than speech, law, or history [that became] the essential defining characteristic of [indigenous] peoples".[66]

As an example, the naked body became a defining trope in the production of the indigenous subject. In Sofia Reding Blase's view, it was the first visible quality assigned to the American native and, furthermore, it was mobilized as a quality of otherness as it became an excuse for the Western world to "transfer this nudity into the physical, spiritual and cultural order".[67] Thus, the native was physically *and* culturally nude; s/he lacked "customs, rites, religion and, importantly, an entrepreneurial spirit that conduces to material gain".[68] The covering of the native body in

European dress became the visible proof of colonialism's positive impact. By hiding the body, a propagandistic effort was mobilized in order to "cancel difference and bear witness to the metamorphic power of clothing, […] that [the native's] savagery is an effect produced by appearances that can be altered".[69] In essence, the dressed native body was the ultimate "token of assimilable otherness".[70]

The colonial construction of othered bodies in Western discourses persists today. As Achille Mbembe argues in his essay "Necropolitics",[71] during the contemporary age the Foucauldian concept of bio-power has become linked with particular understandings of sovereignty and the state of exception. For this author, the classic concept of sovereignty has been depleted insofar as a project for the autonomy and collectivity of subjects linked through communication and mutual understanding. Instead, Mbembe suggests that the core form of sovereignty mobilized in late modernity is necropolitics or, in his words, "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations".[72] This modality of sovereignty is far from being an exceptional excision between the impulses connecting body and mind, but rather it is the very *nomos* of political organization in late modernity.

What is more, Mbembe suggests that the state of exception is the central mechanism for the effective implementation of a necropolitics. He links sovereignty—understood as the exercise of the right to kill—with the normativization of this right. Hence, the necropolitical modality of sovereign power consistently appeals to perceived moments of exceptionalism and emergency, as well as the fictionalized production of "an enemy", in order to enact the "right to kill". In other words, the production of "the other" as absolutely dangerous and, consequently, the target of complete biophysical annihilation in order to guarantee the survival of the collectivity, is at the very core of the normalizing mechanism of a perpetual state of exception. Moreover, the state of exception requires the production of particular cultural imaginaries that serve to justify the implementation of differentiated rights to differentiated categories of social subjects. In short, the social imaginaries that produce "the dangerous other" and, therefore, the legitimization of a perpetual state of exception, are the self-same that can be found at the centre of necropolitics.

Other authors have also focused on the link between contemporary forms of othering in late modernity through the categories of body and coloniality in order to reveal the complicities between the Occidental imaginary and the labour relations in the colonies,[73] as well as the contestation of these biopolitical models through a decolonial "body-

politics".[74] For Walter Mignolo, the body is a fundamental site for the contestation of Occidentalizing forms of knowledge production. In his words, "the geo- and body-politics of knowing (that is, knowledge build upon geohistorical imperial/colonial locations responding to racial and patriarchal classification of bodies and regions)"[75] must be reframed in order to dislocate the Cartesian foundations of "I think, therefore I am" into "*I am where I think*" (my emphasis).[76] Hence, the body itself becomes the site for a potential decolonization of Occidental forms of knowledge through a critical focus on the locus of enunciation, that is, a critical consciousness of "where I am speaking from" or, in other words, a material corporealization of knowledges. The production of particular modern/colonial semiotic regimes, in our case visual cultural products, is central to maintaining these particular regimes of knowledge.

It is precisely through the mobilization of these imaginaries that this volume seeks to explore the relationship between power, materiality, and the body. If the body is presented and re-presented as a body subject to the inscriptions of power in the field of the visible—that which we are *allowed* to see—, then any form of corporeal representation becomes an instance of political authority that separates the subject from its bodily-material source and becomes ideology or, in Elaine Scarry's words, in "a regime's fiction of power".[77] Through this representational fracture, we argue, it is possible to begin to unbuild historically contingent categorizations of the body and to seek new avenues for a decolonial understanding of the body. We hope this book provides tentative inroads to ways of thinking of the body in decolonial terms or, in other words, to begin constructing a decolonial body-politics in response to state-managed Western and Occidentalizing biopolitics and necropolitics.[78]

The Body and Its Parts

Through the above-mentioned shared theoretical reference points, this collection of essays assembles and sets into discussion texts by scholars in various fields that, regardless of their disciplinary origins, have much to say to one another. Within the three sections of the volume, sociologists, art historians, theorists, and media studies researchers showcase their approaches and establish a dialogue with their peers on the multiplicity of ways to understand the body. Concurrently, the book addresses the topic of the body and power through diverse geographical and temporal scopes.

The essays included herein range from the political uses of the body in South American dictatorships in the twentieth century, to renewed constructions of the (de)colonial body in post-Apartheid South Africa, to

the shifts in body science and representations of the body through new technologies, to subversive practices as instances of liberation. The variety of geographical and temporal contexts addressed here enriches the conversation between the contributing authors, and set a reference point for truly interdisciplinary work:

Part I. Activist Bodies looks at the ways in which activist bodies are constructed and represented in diverse visual media. More specifically, each of the essays included in this section analyses the production of activist bodies in a Latin American context, particularly with relation to the military dictatorships that dominated the Southern Cone throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Through their study of the diverse forms of visual media that memorialize, re-activate and re-materialize the bodies of disappeared political activists in a contemporary setting, the authors for these sections consider the links between the materiality of the body and its political deployment in the current context.

Part II. Administered Bodies brings together essays focusing on the administration of bodies of populations as a technology of power in the Foucauldian sense, and its corresponding representation in visual media. Taking into consideration the late-modern condition of the body as an object of neo-disciplinary action in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the authors for this section locate and analyse the most recent technologies for disciplining an increasingly changing material and political body.

Part III. Subversive and (De)Colonial Bodies draws links between colonial and postcolonial constructions of the body in both their material and political dimensions. Specifically, the essays for this section scrutinize the historical links between the colonial production of the body and contemporary strategies for disarticulating these subject formations in a contemporary context. The essays in this section explore diverse strategies for subverting the (post)colonial body in visual arts, specifically through the representational techniques deployed by contemporary artists of the global south.

Finally, the proposed afterword, entitled "'Afterwards:' Struggling with Bodies in the Dump of History" by Marina Gržinić, considers established approaches to the body in Western thought and suggests the possibility of thinking of the body in decolonial terms that supersede the taken-for-grantedness of Western philosophical approaches to corporeality.

Furthermore, Gržinić links the physical-material violence against the body to an epistemic violence through which othered knowledges are relegated to the fringes of the current late-modern world system. In this closing essay, Gržinić suggests that the "body that centrally entangles materiality and power today in Europe is the body of the refugee".[79] Therefore, any possibility to disarticulate Western categories for the colonization of the othered body must pass through a radical questioning of our categories for thinking of the disenfranchised body. Following suit, this volume hopes to contribute to thinking of the body "otherwise" and providing visibility on problematic exercises of the body that put into question taken for granted assumptions of what it means to be human.

Notes

[1] Darryll Grantly and Nina Taunton, *The Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 5.
[2] Grantley and Taunton, *The Body in Late Medieval and Modern Culture*, 2.
[3] Aristotle, *Politics*, 350 B.C., I:5.
[4] Antonello Gerbi, *La disputa del Nuevo Mundo. Historia de una polémica* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960), 63. In an interesting reversal, Las Casas used this Aristotelian argument in favour of the New World Indians, by arguing that their constitutions were weak, thin, incapable of any bodily effort, "lacking the physical requirements to be slaves" (Gerbi 1960:63). In this discursive turn, Las Casas vindicated the natives' delicate bodies and graceful gestures as the marks of natural freemen.
[5] David Hillman and Carla Mazzio, *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1997), xiii.
[6] Sofía Reding Blase, *El buen salvaje y el caníbal* (Mexico: UNAM, 1992), 10.
[7] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge 1995), 16.
[8] Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 16.
[9] Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 16.
[10] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 223.
[11] Greenblatt, *Marvellous Possessions*, 85.
[12] Hillman and Mazzio, *The Body in Parts*, xi.
[13] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Indiannapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 320.
[14] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 320.
[15] Cited in Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 19.
[16] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 19.
[17] Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance* (New York: Icon Editors, 1993), 119.
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PART I:

ACTIVIST BODIES

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSMUTATIONS: BODY AND DICTATORSHIP IN CHILEAN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DOCUMENTARIES OF THE 2000S

JOSÉ M. SANTA CRUZ G.

If the body is a political space, an essay about the body should be politically aesthetic…

Recent Chilean fictional film has repeatedly depicted Chile's last dictatorship (1973-1990), but only two films stand out for the way they address the relationship between the body and its (social, political and economic) surroundings: *Machuca* (2004) by Andrés Wood and *Post Mortem* (2010) by Pablo Larraín. These films elaborate on two different images of the body in relation to dictatorship. *Machuca* tells the story of Gonzalo, an upper-class adolescent who befriends two lower-class teens—Pedro Machuca and Silvana—during the months just before the *coup d'état*. Pedro and Gonzalo are classmates in a private school to which poor children gained access as part of one of Popular Unity's social integration plans. At the end of the film—four weeks after the military coup of 11 September 1973—Gonzalo and the others return to a classroom in which many seats are empty. There are no poor schoolmates anymore; they have disappeared. It is this absence that embodies the disappeared body.[1]

The second image of the body is detailed in Larraín's *Post Mortem.* The film tells the fictional story of Mario Cornejo, a notary at Santiago's Legal Medical Service, who witnesses one of the most important events of the *coup d'état*: the autopsy of president Salvador Allende. During the course of the film, Larraín keeps placing dead bodies in a morgue until the whole place is full of corpses, one upon the other, filling up the entire visual field. Among the corpses, we see a few human "automatons" following military orders. The morgue is used here as a special place for

military violence. The body is envisioned as a mass without identity, a mass that suffocates space. Two films, two kinds of bodies: the disappeared body and the executed body.

In contrast to those images, Chilean cinema was suddenly inundated by a series of autobiographical documentaries searching for other forms of audio-visual representation of the dictatorship. An aesthetic rift was opened within national film production by films such as *En algún lugar del cielo* [*Somewhere in the Sky*] (2003) by Alejandra Carmona, *Reinalda del Carmen, mi Mamá y Yo* [*Reinalda del Carmen, My Mother and I*] (2006) by Lorena Giachino Torréns, *Calle Santa Fe* [*Santa Fe Street*] (2007) by Carmen Castillo, *Mi vida con Carlos* [*My Life with Carlos*] (2008) by Germán Berger, *La Quemadura* [*The Burn*] (2009) by René Ballesteros, or *El eco de las canciones* [*The Echo of the Songs*] (2010) by Antonia Rossi. These documentaries were immediately picked up by Chilean Film Studies, and two books were dedicated to the subject: *Documentales autobiográficos chilenos* [*Chilean Autobiographical Documentaries*] (2010) by Constanza Vergara and Michelle Bossy, and *Las imágenes que no me olvidan. Documental autobiográfico y (pos)memoria de la Dictadura militar chilena* [*Images that Do Not Forget Me. Autobiographical Documentary and (Post)Memory of the Chilean Military Dictatorship*] (2013) by Claudia Barril.

Both Vergara and Bossy, and Barril encourage us to read this type of film production through the prism of the politicity of intimacy. According to the first authors—and following the now long-established, overused slogan of "the personal is political" coined by Carol Hanisch—, the audio-visual pieces in question engage with the grief and traumatic experience of familial relationships without pretending to represent or "to reconstruct life in its totality and complexity".[2] This article, however, is not about the "true" or "real" politicity of intimacy. I would rather like to venture another hypothesis: if there is any kind of politicity in these documentaries, it can only emerge in tension with a larger field of aesthetic productions of the body since the *coup d'état* of 11 September 1973.

The Chilean Body

To think about Chile's socio-political processes of the last forty years without taking into account the body truly means not thinking this period through fully. The body was one of the central pillars of the country's social engineering. I focus on social engineering, not social politics because the military dictatorship erased any possibility of the political