

Man: body and soul or two bodies?

An attempt for a modern understanding of man in a corporeal perspective

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The corporeality/incorporeality dyad is well established in human cultural consciousness. Hence the problem in considering the human body alone. Being in constant opposition to some kind of incorporeality, the body at the same time serves to discuss it. Similarly, incorporeality is often nothing but a sphere in which one can escape from the problems of the human body, the complex area of the soul, culture and society oppositions. However, although synonymous in expressing the oppositeness of the body, the idea of soul and the notions of culture and society behave differently. Culture and society turn human body into a more definite subject. And they make the issue of the human body seem more complicated and specific today.

Modern debate on the human body. This topic involves two sets of problems: of the body as a symbol in the verbal and nonverbal languages of culture, and the relationship between bodily structure and the organization of man's social existence.

Philosophical anthropology after Husserl and theoretical ethnography following the school of Marcel Moss deal with the first set of questions. Here is the formulation of the French anthropologist: the body is the primary and most natural tool of man in his cultural pursuits. Although corporeal behavior and the moral and intellectual activities of man are generally opposed on the basis of the nature/culture opposition, corporeal behavior is not universally and extraculturally granted. Sexual practices, eating and sleeping manners are not natural but culture-based symbolic techniques. Human corporeal behavior is a historically mobile subject. Therefore, the notion of the body turns out to be as historically transformable as the categories of 'personality' and 'self'.

American anthropologists (R. Benedict, M. Mead) elaborate on Moss's ideas as follows: in the process of upbringing, the culture of a society becomes firmly imprinted onto the corporeal behavior of the individual. Using relevant data about traditional modern societies, British anthropologist Mary Douglas infers that the control exercised by the social system can reduce the corporeal means of expression. Thus, a closed system of hierarchy results in a 'spiritualization' of the verbal and nonverbal languages, while an open social organization tends to intensify their somatic aspect. Social communication suggests that irrelevant bodily manifestations should be suppressed; consequently, the more complex the social system, the more communication between people in it resembles communication between incorporeal souls. The body is a source of noise, so to say, for the 'social corpus', as it disturbs the regular flow of social information.

At the same time, the human body ensures a parallel between society and social hierarchy by being divided into more representative and less representative, more corporeal and less corporeal parts. Thus, we come to the question of the reverse relationship, formulated very well by the French anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan. The body and bodily phenomena produce symbols to express the complex ideas of nature and chaos, while the society, which supplies the symbols of culture and order, imitates the actual organization of the human body. There is sufficient evidence to speak of exteriorization of the bodily structure into the 'social corpus'. Society transfers the

notion of hierarchy to the human body in order to impose a missing order, though, from a biological point of view, the body is far not a chaos.

Hence the question of whether the social imprint onto the body is external to it, or, on the contrary, society - as a network of relations between individuals, communities and external social environment – is not just different but also peculiar structure, which replicates and complements the natural corporeal organization. We would like to ask ourselves to what extent does the social system represent a body entirely different from the individual, and to what extent it is an extrapolation of his physiological structure?

‘Natural’ characteristics of the human body. Our body is an intricate system for exchange with certain environment and, accordingly, it receives and transmits information. Within this system we can observe an *internal closed circle* and an *external open* one. The external physiological system consists of mechanism for processing substances and information from outside, and of information stored in the chromosomes of every cell.

The so-called internal closed circle depends very much on external natural conditions. It is hard for the individual consciousness to penetrate this internal circle, regulated by sensory delight and discomfort, coincidence and inconsistency of the norm assigned to the organism, and the values of the external and internal environment at a certain point of time. In this circle, on the level of the closed biological body and its internal, genetically defined experience, we find the fate of the human organism as universally determined by the environment in which it is supposed to exist.

Just like all living creatures, like insects and plants, man takes in and casts out (substances and information). This openness towards certain environment occurs together with a closeness for other environments and the broad environment of the world in general. If we can speak of difference within this category of comparatively autonomous organisms, it would result from the growing independence of certain species from the environment, and thus, their increased mobility and adaptiveness, which also means actual detachment from the attributed biological location.

All living creatures try to overcome the attributiveness of their existence through additionally developed programs within the frame of the biological living conditions. Most animal species develop two additional programs. The first one consists in the building of a particular location, complementary to their natural environment (a hollow, place for sleeping and temporary dwelling or a food store), while the second involves the formation of ‘social organization’ - a larger or smaller community for food finding. Paradoxically, insects like ants and bees show the same relationship between additionally developed environment and ‘social’ organization typical for man. These means of improving and exceeding the capacity of a single individual in animals can be found in the already mentioned internal biological circle. Therefore no animal exists autonomously.

It is still unclear what happened during biological evolution as to allow the complementary living environment and the related social organization, both products of man, to detach themselves from the external conditions that determine his existence, and become alterable and unstable. This dissociation resulted in the development of complex systems in man and in his difference from animals. The bodily structure of an animal uses primarily the internal circle already mentioned, while that of man has two circles. Complementary to the closed circle of biological orientation within a well-defined environment, at the heart of which is a genetically

determined program, the human organism develops an open circle of further adjustment. Information received from outside predominates in this circle. The biological body of man becomes psychophysiological and adjustable to a more complex exchange with the complementary social environment.

Thanks to this environment, which – in contrast to that of ants – is already a thing in itself, an unsteady and changeable application to biological conditions, man enters new environments and, finally, the world that is immediately present in his experience. Before being revealed to the consciousness, the magic of this transition from the small biological world to the world in general is prepared and offered by something as real as the labile complementary environment produced by man, and the fact that in its independence from the natural location it has its own internal mobility. The individual, made human through the presence of such an environment, becomes – just like it – more independent in his own movement. His very consciousness develops as a form of the mobility and obliquity of his relatedness to the environment.

Or, if we follow the traditional classifications according to which except for his instrument for direct reference to the biological environment, i.e. the body, man has also an instrument of oblique reference, the so-called ‘soul’, then in a bodily perspective we can claim that he has an *additional body*, which makes him more autonomous from the firmly set biological environment, and next, from its social complement as well. Before being anything else, *transcendence*, which indeed determines human essence, has the elementary form of exceeding the capacity of one’s own body.

The two circles, that of the biological and that of the superstructured origin, seem hardly separable within the corpus of any particular individual. I would like to use an example. As a product of civilization, the airplane provides the individual with speed and stability that exceed the natural characteristics of his body. A good answer to the question about the corporeal definiteness of one who flies by plane should not refer to the corpus of that plane as something completely external to the small biological body.

Therefore, if we are to speak in a bodily perspective, we should claim that, in contrast to animals, man has *two bodies*. At first glance, this way of putting it does not appear more effective than the traditional bi- (body/soul) and tripartition (spirit/soul/body). Thus, however, an emphasis is placed on one’s inability to speak properly of man unless one considers his fluctuating attachment to/ detachment from certain environment, and the fact that this actually means to discover the degrees and manifestations of such relatedness to various environments within the human corporeality itself.

By using the above formulation, we can perceive the so-called ‘soul’ not only as an external psychical ‘organ’ but also as an externally expressed one, manifested in the expansion of the biological body into instruments and other intermediaries, as a kind of corporeal mobility resulting in transitions between the body and the complementary environment produced by man. In my opinion, this environment is not just neutrally external to the biological body, but is also a specific manifestation of man’s soul and spirit, of his ability to establish relationships with the temporally and spatially remote, the other, the otherness and the world provided through intermediation as a whole.

Individual and society: going beyond the human body. The perspective of the expanding biological body of man, which in this way overcomes its initial attachment

to particular environment and transforms it into complementary attachments, allows us to think nonmetaphysically not only of the individual but of society as well.

If, to the individual, the labile environment is revealed as the so-called double body and a higher ability to relate to various types of otherness, then society itself, in its sole material appearance as a system of objects and tools of knowledge and labor, turns out to be a corpus with structure resembling that of human biology and serving to assimilate the materiality of nature. The others participating in the social network come to express the same expansion of the human body in a complementary environment – a kind of living social corpus.

I do not claim that the body individual belongs to that real opposition, that structure of relations we call society. I simply emphasize the adverse position which usually remains out of consideration, i.e., that social environment is intimately dependent on the ‘natural’ characteristics of the human body. And as human body, it is neither indistinguishable from the social environment, nor placed outside it. In many ways it ‘coalesces’ with this environment. The bodily and social structures for substance and information exchange are not only in ultimate opposition but also correspond to and complement each other as similar.

I do not claim that the social structure repeats the dynamics of the living human body, but that by becoming more and more estranged, they both originate from each other. Without the so-called labile environment, the biologically determined external system of the human body would never develop the additional adjustability we mythologically call soul and spirit, but would rather expand into nonmythological sensitivity and consciousness. The social corpus itself would never develop as a kind of otherness supported by and dis/similar to the human body, and engaged in a perpetual play with it, in which sometimes allows it into itself, yet others pushes it away, towards the temporally and spatially finite physiological entity of the body. In this play, the human body is always undefined and seemingly becoming, subjected to various kinds of transcendence – sometimes real, like flying on an airplane or seeking refuge in smaller and larger communities, sometimes ideal, like being elated by values, ideals and systems of belief.

The standpoint revealed in such presentation of the problem would help reinforce the idea – indispensable to modern anthropology – that *society is the individual's environment for transcendence* and social development can be regarded as a kind of changeability that leads to the intensification of this transcendence. Paradoxically, society is the real attempt of man to achieve immortality.

In order to perceive the mechanism of this environment, where man develops to the seemingly higher degree of the social corpus, we should not separate the two major ways of building the social network, i.e., through *objects and devices* and through *norms and values*, for the purpose in both cases is to achieve uniform functioning of the social organism. The social corpus can hardly be maintained through exchange of objects alone, without the superposition of values independent from the world of objects.

Nevertheless, if the open and expanding reality of today somehow differs from the traditional closed human worlds, it is by the fact that nowadays objects in general, and the ‘biologically designed’ ones (i.e., devices) in particular, maintain the unity of the social network far more effectively than values and norms do. In this way, the individual becomes entirely and more fully integrated in this or that larger community.

In this sense, the modern individual is not simply detached and unintegrated into a small and limited community, like the man of the past, and hence, deprived of

the intimacy of natural human existence. This is exactly what makes him readily integrated into larger human communities and, finally, into the desired totality of mankind as a whole. Such integration does not suppress human individuality; on the contrary: in order to be achieved, it needs the individual's higher valence and thus, his higher state of individuation.

Given the existence of various objects and information means for indirect communication, this way of integration renders the normative ideal superpositions needless, and can be carried out nonaggressively, with particular attention towards the energy-rich human corporeality, which is indispensable to the social environment. The human body, once endangering traditional culture and considered an indication of chaos, now is not only recognized as a form of order, but also enables the search for the individual within this order or, in other words, allows to think of individual disorderliness as order.

All of the above means that integration into a community could be external and ineffective, but also internal, effective and providing better exchangeability between individual and society. Such interrelation is far more attractive than release from any social constrain, whereas the individual is left unpromoted to a higher degree due to social potencies overflowing towards him. Modern European civilization needs the wisdom hidden within our specific bodies. In fact, with this I repeat the wonderful maxim of Marguerite Yourcenar from her 'Memoirs of Hadrian' that our 'mind incorporates but a small part of the processing capacity of our body'.

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This text is a revised and abridged version of the chapter 'Human body, individual and culture' from my book 'Change in life and text: rhetoric essays on the difficulties of transformation', Sofia, 1998. The following references have been used:

- M. Moss, *Les techniques du corps*, in: *Journal de psychologie*, 1936, 3-4.
- M. Moss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, 1973.
- M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols. Explorations in Cosmology*, London, 1973.
- A. Leroi-Gourhan, *Le geste et la parole*, II, Paris, 1965.
- S. Moicho, *Körpersprache*, München, 1983.

For Yourcenar, see *Бележки по историята на написването*, in: М. Юрсенар, *Мемоарите на Адриан*, С. 1983.