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The Body in the Mirror of Consciousness

Abstract: The present approach follows the "problematic" relationships among body, mind and consciousness, their comfortable vicinities, and, at the same time, the tense ones, in disagreement, which ultimately make us uncomfortable "in our own skin". What does it mean to be a body or to have a body? What does it mean to have a conscience? How exactly do the two realities "communicate" and interact? On an historical scale, numerous metaphors describe the oscillating evolution of public perception relative to the body. There have been talks of the body as a micro- or macro-cosmos, as "dungeon of the soul", "grave" of the soul, "temple of the Holy Spirit," organism, machine, clock, mechanism, instrument of action, archetype of beauty, "mirror" of social relations, source of alienation. The "pneumatic body," the body as a "democratically organized system of forces", the body as "an organic federation, led by a soul" (Leibniz), the "social body" (Marx), the "body without organs," the body as a "desiring-machine" (Deleuze and Guattari) and, more recently, the "image body" (Paul Ardenne) have also been invoked. As a representation of the body, the image has a certain artificiality, given by our predisposition to simulation. We are seen either as we are, or as we would like to be, or as others want us to be. When exposed to the gaze of others, the body becomes a dynamic, versatile image, one that we work on or seek to retouch. The "aestheticization of the body" according to the agreed standards of perfection at a given time occurs in the "mirror" of consciousness, which acts sometimes permissively or indulgently and sometimes tyrannically, triggering unpredictable reactions. Can we speak today of a "crisis" of the body? And, if so, what would be the best strategies to overcome it? How can one gain "self-esteem"? What is the key factor in acquiring or re-acquiring "self-confidence"? The body? The mind? The consciousness?.

Keywords: body, mind, consciousness, self-care, self-esteem, self-technologies, somatic aesthetics.

1. *Terminological ambiguities.* When we talk about body, mind, and consciousness, we easily find that for each word the semantic indeterminacies are sovereign, and the ambiguities of use – real epistemic obstacles. In Romanian, sometimes we invoke the corpus, sometimes the body, without explaining the basis of their differentiated use. Therefore, the discussions about consciousness mobilize heterogeneous terms – soul, spirit, mind, brain, intelligence, reason, my-self, self – invoked, as a rule, in

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specific philosophical and psychological contexts. An unprecedented scientific descent mobilizes, among others, neurobiology, evolutionary biology, genetics, cognitive sciences, linguistics, neuroscience, quantum mechanics, computer science, cybernetics, artificial intelligence, ready to explore with specific tools the problematic "fields" on which it assumes competence.

In common speech, the mind and consciousness receive meanings that first highlight all the differences. One may have a "brilliant mind" or an "illustrious brain," but "rebukes" or "regrets" – if any – are only a matter of consciousness, meaning of that intimate and vigilant "court" that evaluates one's own gestures or decisions. How could the mind be described? As a reason in practice, a process of cognition, applied thinking, associative intelligence, agility in search of solutions or solutions. Psychologists tell us that, in fact, the mind represents the result of the mutual action between consciousness and the brain. Any damage to the organ of thought causes immeasurable mental and physiological reactions. Psychopathology investigates and diagnoses memory deficits, loss of consciousness, identity, or personality disorders. Physical integrity generally guarantees the balanced functioning of the mind and consciousness.

Does consciousness in any way imply intelligence? Or, on the contrary, is it independent of it? Here also the answers are shared: in some situations, it would be said that yes (the nature, content and consistency of information stored in the brain seriously influence our decisions); in others, not (artificial intelligence, as for computers or robots, excludes consciousness from the start). Therefore, what could consciousness be (more)? Subjective, autoscopic and reflective court alike, a personalized moral and axiological censor, self-"judge", but also of others.

To be conscious means, on one hand, assumed intentional conduct, reflection, vigilance, self-concern, but also care for the others; it means, on the other hand, to have the feeling of your own identity and personality, of your "uniqueness" in relation to the world. That is why the formation of consciousness is a gradual, lasting process, starting from childhood. Psychologists also describe in successive stages the sedimentation of a "bodily consciousness" (Wallon 1959, 258). In most situations, recognizing one's own body as distinct but also similar to the others implies an essential experience – that of looking in the mirror (Bernard 1995, 39). The image of the body is part of the representations that the subject makes on himself. It matters more and more "what is seen," the way we look, and, at the same time, the way we are perceived.

The body is felt as the center of the sensations and lived experiences, which exclusively belongs to us and with which we identify. We are the authors of our own actions, as long as our body, at the urging of the mind or conscience, deliberately assumes them. But there are also situations –

calling them pathological or deviant – when this "complicity" does not work. I feel I am the author of the intentions and actions of thought, without participating with my own body, as I can perform actions mechanically, without the explicit and effective participation of consciousness (Jeannerod 2010, 193). If the innocence of the first age is both inborn and natural, the in-consciousness of the mature man (of the one who premeditatedly suspends any judgment) is as reprehensible as possible, being, in fact, the source of all misdemeanor and monstrosities.

Most studies associate the consciousness of the intimate and private sphere. Psychoanalysis, in the canonical versions of Freud, Adler and Jung, for example, studies the sub-terranean of consciousness, the turbulent, nebulous areas of the personal and collective sub- and un-conscious, in which impulses, obsessions, complexes and frustrations are camouflaged. Here, the Self, the Ego and the Supra-Ego dispute their primacy and the force of contamination and seduction. On the other hand, sociology and anthropology approach the phenomena of consciousness in a social context, seeking to explain its fluctuations at the scale of large groups or communities. Customs, stereotypes, mentalities, projections of the imaginary, religious options, lifestyles are aimed..., shaped according to specific traditions and "ideologies".

2. *A stigmatized body.* The West owes to Greco-Roman philosophy and then to Christianity the current perspective on the body, but also on its proximity to the soul. It is known that the Greeks recognized an equal rank in body and mind. An expression assigned to them, which has become common in the medical discourse of Antiquity, praises the agreement between a healthy mind and a healthy body. However, on the philosophical side, things have not always been the same. In accordance with an entire tradition which saw the body as a "prison" of the soul, Plato recognizes the former as second in relation to the rational part. Driven rather by passions, the body is incapable of reaching the essence of things (*Phaidon* 65c). However, it can be modeled or educated (*Timaeus* 88, c-b), if he accepts the ascendancy and priority of the soul (*The Republic* 3, 403b).

Christianity will make a decisive contribution to the depreciation and even stigmatization of the body. As the Bible says, man was created "in the own image" of God. If we read the passages in which the sequences of temptation and sin are evoked, we also discover the moment of becoming aware of the possession of one's own bodies. Expelled from Heaven and exiled to the world to atone for their guilt and experience precariousness, Adam and Eve received from the Creator "garments of skin" and – as the text says – "felt ashamed" (*Genesis* 3:21). Shame on one's own nakedness can be a sign of a perception of the body as a personal and distinct reality.

The body is shown here both in the "mirror" of one's own consciousness and in the "eyes" of God. Prudishness is precisely the gesture of withdrawal, of retreat of consciousness in a situation of exposure considered "intimate" and inappropriate; the redness of the cheeks, the gazes fixed on the ground are the body's response to the stimuli of barely raising consciousness. The recognition of the sin committed takes the form of regret, obviously in the very postures of the two. In this case, the "skin" is the stigmatized one; it becomes a perishable garment, a figure of appearance, of the mask, of the chameleonic versatility, of the surface that simulates and conceals. Stripped of skin, the man shows himself as he is, only "flesh and blood", revealing his ephemeral condition. Christianity will repudiate and severely punish the sins of the flesh. After the Last Judgment, the bodies of the wicked will burn in the fire of Hell. But the happy eternity of Paradise is one without bodies. Their materiality and vulnerability contradict the exigency of perfection, so that only the souls of the good and the righteous ones will join the feast of eternal salvation.

3. *A skilled sailor*. Devalued by most Christian theologians, the body will be recognized in Descartes' writings with a "substance" rank distinct from the soul. However, *res cogitans* and *res extensa* interact in a real way, "as if confound". The relationship between the two substances is similar to that between the sailor and the ship; the soul "lives" and "leads" to the target this massive and hard-to-control... body (Descartes 1992, 294). Here, the body is the "support" of the soul, the "place" from which it exercises its prerogatives as a leader. Concerned with "locating" the soul, Descartes identifies a gland at the base of the brain, the pineal gland, as the "headquarters" of the thinking substance, which functions as an autonomous command center. In order to be able to exercise its leadership skills, the soul needs a specialized mediating body to justify the good "coexistence" between soul and body.

The following centuries will sabotage the idea of the prevalence of the soul in relation to the body. In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche discusses consciousness, identifying several "errors" in its reception. The first one aims at "absurd overestimation," which makes consciousness "a unity, an essence: 'the spirit', 'the soul', something that feels, thinks, desires..." (Nietzsche 1999, 341). Nietzsche believes that the overestimation of consciousness is as uninspired as the exaggerated appreciation of the body.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, the philosopher addresses at one point the "despisers of the body," describing his relationship with the soul through a confusing cascade of metaphors: "The body is a great reason, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd. An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call 'spirit' – a little instrument and toy of your great reason [...] Behind your thoughts and

feelings, my brother, there stands a mighty ruler, an unknown sage – whose name is self. In your body he dwells; he is your body." (Nietzsche 1994, 89-90). In Nietzsche, the *great reason of the body* and the *embedded Self* are two terminological "innovations," which explain to us the way in which the body and reason intertwine and determine each other. If in Descartes the soul "leads" the body, in Nietzsche reason is presented as the "instrument" of the body, and the Self is the privileged inhabitant of the latter.

The Self, in Nietzsche's opinion, is stronger than the senses, but also than reason. The idea of the Self seen as a dark and chaotic part of the mind, as a source of libido (cauldron of energy and excitement in continuous boiling), will be recycled and adapted by Freud, who was not inspired by Nietzsche, as one might think, but from the research of Georg Groddeck, a brilliant Viennese psychiatrist of the time. The position of the new inhabitant of the psyche will be intensely disputed. Although it influences our behavior and decisions, the Self remains external to consciousness. But not passive or inert.

4. *The dialectic of mastery and obedience.* Phenomenology will take the discussions to another level of abstraction, making the "description" of feelings, states or events of consciousness a true speculative program. Reinterpreting Descartes, Husserl notes the difficulty of discussing consciousness, denouncing "the failure of all modern attempts to distinguish between the psychological and philosophical theory of consciousness" (Husserl 1994, 70). What is its hallmark? Consciousness is and must be intentional, meaning to be "consciousness of something," taken as the object of a transcendental description. "Intentionality is the generic essence of consciousness. [...] All feelings that have this property of essence are called 'intentional feelings'; to the extent that those feelings are 'consciousness of something,' we will say that they 'intentionally relate' to that 'something.'" (Husserl 2011, 136). The transcendental reduction committed in the phenomenological description "puts in parentheses" the world, including the body. This is not a simple "representation" of consciousness, but rather something "that is constituted within consciousness," it is the deductive work of the transcendental *ego*.

In his *Phenomenology of Perception*, Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses the relationship between consciousness and body in different theoretical parameters. "To be consciousness itself, or rather *to be experience itself*, means to communicate from within with the world, with the body, and with others, to be with them, instead of being next to them..." (Merleau-Ponty 1999, 130). The body expresses total existence, "not because it is an external accompaniment to that existence, but because existence realizes itself in the body. This incarnate significance is the central phenomenon of which body and mind, sign and significance are abstract moments" (Merleau-Ponty

1999, 208). The body is the fixed existence, and the existence – a continuous incarnation. Existence cannot be reduced not only to the body or sexuality, but not only to the mind. The relationship between the two is similar to that between speech and thought, in the sense that the former "expresses" the other, not being able to function separately.

As Merleau-Ponty believes, there are more ways for the body to be body, and more ways for consciousness to be consciousness. Consciousness must be defined in a phenomenological sense, as a reference to an object, as being-in-the-world, and the body – as its vehicle to be-in-the-world. For the French phenomenologist, the body is eminently an expressive space, the "means of having a world" where it makes its presence felt.

For what reasons does man show his own body? Either to fascinate or to overcome his fears. The individual oscillates between modesty and its lack. Thus, the two "take their place in a dialectic of the self and the other which is that of master and slave: in so far as I have a body, I may be reduced to the status of an object beneath the gaze of another person, and no longer count as a person for him, or else I may become his master and, in my turn, look at him. But this mastery is self-defeating [...] Saying that I have a body is thus a way of saying that I can be seen as an object and that I try to be seen as a subject, that another can be my master or my slave, so that shame and shamelessness express the dialectic of the plurality of consciousness, and have a metaphysical significance." (Merleau-Ponty 1999, 209). Therefore, the body is both the subject and the object of the gaze, depending on the role assumed, on the posture in which it relates to others, but also on how it chooses to expose itself to the gaze, thus triggering the unpredictable games of domination and servitude.

5. *The alienated body.* Phenomenology relativizes the perspective on the body. For example, in some of the profile writings, the idea of the "extended" body is invoked, whose organs are artificially extended, thus with a compensatory use. For the blind, the cane is the tactile extension of the eyes deprived of the faculty of sight. The body itself suffers in the absence or loss of the other – the parent, the child, the partner, the friend – perceived as indispensable. The house, the city, the country can also be extensions of the body beyond its physical boundaries. Departure, alienation, exile can be the pretexts of an acute metaphysical discomfort, felt as lack, anxiety, despair.

The disease, as a functional imbalance or as a deficit of vitality, sometimes amplifies to the paroxysm the "consciousness" of the body. Life is even more precious if, at some point, it has been seriously tested. Proximity or threat of death exponentially increase the mindfulness for the body itself. On the other hand, the healthy body seeks different forms of "alienation," some instrumentalizing its possibilities on the vector of

efficiency increment, others fixing it as a center of interest – either as a source of pleasure or as a place of proliferating seduction. In this context, comfort, control, power, beauty, eroticism become the favorite refuges of the body that "experiences" the world.

In his time, Marcuse denounced that "repressive desublimation" that makes the individual orient his transforming energies towards himself. Work and sports are just some of these forms of "alienation" (Bernard 1995, 12). The de-eroticized body is put at the service of industrial efficiency, in working position. Author of a study on the body, Michel Bernard observes a change in the mentality of the body: "The civilization that was one against the body, a repression of it, seems to turn into a civilization of the body, and the negative culture of the body becomes a positive and affirmative one. The body has become a fetish value in all spheres of culture..." (Bernard 1995, 13). The body is a mediator... not a closed reality; everyone wants to feel good "in their own skin," in their own protective coating.

Actually, "being in your own skin" translates to the comfortable closeness between body and consciousness. Narcissism describes it in terms of gratitude, delight, and care – sometimes exaggerated – for its own body and image. On the contrary, feeling "alien" in someone's own skin is the expression of a conflict, of a tense relationship of consciousness with someone's own body. Hence an endless list of "diseases" – either of the body or of the soul. Identifying the *New Diseases of the Soul*, Julia Kristeva believes that "there are diseases of the soul comparable to somatic ones. Passions are part of them" (Kristeva 2005, 9). As an autonomous discipline, psychoanalysis mobilizes an arsenal of survey methods and techniques, through which it seeks to improve and heal the slippage of consciousness.

6. *The treacherous body*. Daniel C. Dennett – one of the nowadays most important philosophers of mind – returns to Descartes' explanatory scheme, but acknowledges to the body the "merits" that the post-Cartesian tradition has neglected. In reality, as the American believes, I cannot be separated from my current body, clearly separated from it... My body contains as much of me, of the values, talents, memories, and skills that make me who I am, as much as my nervous system. Even among those who fought Descartes' vision there is a strong tendency to treat the mind (in other words, the brain) as the head of the body, as the pilot of the ship. By accepting this standard way of thinking, I ignore an important alternative: to consider that the brain (and therefore the mind) is also an organ like so many others, a recent controlling usurper, which I will not understand until I will treat it not as a boss, but as a servant, a servant like many others, who works to promote the interests of the body that shelters and nourishes it and gives meaning to its activities (Dennett 2006, 90).

Daniel C. Dennett's arguments sensibly sum up the thesis of the superiority of the soul or spirit over the body, even if the Cartesian image of a "puppet-self" trying to control the disobedient puppet-body is still extraordinarily strong. But we must admit, the body is not easy to manipulate or control – as one might think at first glance. There are situations – not a few – when he does not "listen" to anyone and, even less, to his own conscience. The appetite of the obese gourmet in front of the favorite food platter, for example, cannot be stopped by simple medical or rational arguments. The passionate enthusiasm of lovers is rather "blind" to the censorship of logical thinking or to the moral filters claimed by others. Sometimes the body seeks to free itself from the severe control of consciousness, resorting to evasive solutions (alcohol, hallucinogens...), meant to weaken its attention and alertness. At the same time, it can also betray the hidden secrets, hurriedly agitating, blushing, trembling, sweating, in other words displaying "signs" that tell the truth in another way, even abstracting the speech. Only in the theatrical play, when actors skilled in the art of concealment easily enter the "skin" and mind of the characters, the substitution of roles and gestures is both "tasted" and accepted without reservation.

7. *The disarticulated body and the tyrannies of appearance.* Aware of the perceptual fluctuations regarding the own bodies, Susie Orbach – the author of a book that proposes a "rethinking of the relationship between mind and body" – considers that today these "are our ever-malleable calling cards, either erasing or articulating our class, geographic and ethnic backgrounds and gender aspirations." (Orbach 2008, 12). The search for visual recognition and confirmation is so diligent that omitting a time to check your face or appearance in the mirror may seem strange or inappropriate.

There are many readings that emphasize the critical perspective. Describing the body as the "mirror of the world," Jasmine Chasseguet-Smirgel presents it as radically "disarticulated," like the world in which we live (Chasseguet-Smirgel 2008, 21). "Deconstruction" is even more virulent from the perspective of the Frenchman David Le Breton. In a reference work for understanding the "anthropology of the body," he denounces the "tyrannies of appearance," those that make someone's own body an *alter ego*. From a phenomenological point of view, man cannot be separated from his body. It is not a possession of circumstance, but it is the being-in-the-world without which man would not exist... The human condition is corporeal. Unpleasant states (illness, uncertainty, disability, fatigue, pain, etc.) or pleasure (tenderness, sensuality, etc.) give the person the feeling that "he cannot control his body" (Le Breton 2009, 289). Both appreciated and despised, "the body is perceived as something other than the individual it

embodies" (Le Breton 2009, 290). In fact, today we reiterate the posture of the *écorché* of Valverde de Amusco (Spanish anatomist of the 17th century), contemplating thoughtfully, without pain or nostalgia, the skin he holds in his hand, like an old coat, and which he is preparing to have repaired. Explanation? Not feeling well among the others, he takes refuge in himself, trying to feel good in his own body, in his own skin.

David Le Breton's critiques aim to transform the body into the only landmark of identity. Man is no longer defined by the soul – as Descartes believed. The body is like a curtain on which a sense of identity can be projected reshuffled at any time. Subjected to repeated metamorphoses, the body is the field of a persevering "identity retouch," of a temporary staging of presence. Invested with the power to replace the self, it keeps only the status of a draft waiting to be taken seriously, finished, and signed. "Between man and body there is an interfering game of difference between self and self and of an extreme joy at the idea of becoming an inventive and tireless master of his own appearance. Taking care of one's own body becomes a full-time job for some. Especially the society of the show imposes a cult of appearance... In its capacity of representative of the self, the body becomes a personal affirmation, highlighting an aesthetic and a morality of presence" (Le Breton 2009, 294).

Nowadays, the body is an *alter ego*, Le Breton believes, in the first instance another deceptive self, but always available for all sorts of changes. In order to grow in one's own eyes, it is important that the body signs are visibly multiplied; somehow you put yourself out of the self to become yourself. "The external aestheticization of the body has effects on the inside. The interiority materializes in an effort of exteriority. Intimacy disappears in favor of 'extimacy'." These "tyrants of appearance" demand uninterrupted work on the self... Self-care is hyperbolized in the form of consumption, which gives rise to an industry of modeling and beauty. The anthropomorphic pattern promoted more and more aggressively today is that of the bodybuilder – an island that painstakingly builds a kind of sumptuous and infallible body shelter, in which he thinks he is "master of himself" or in which he creates the illusion that he is himself; the bodybuilder "bathes in the phantom of his own conception," assuming his body as a "second skin," as an over-body, a protective body, where he finally feels comfortable.

8. *Foreign body and self-esteem.* We live, in fact, under the sign of a "despotism of fashion." The contemporary trend is not that of sophistication of the appearance, as evidenced by Le Breton's analyzes, but that of "nutritional constraints, fitness and maintenance activities... In a system marked by the pluralism of appearances, everyone is their own stylist [...]; we are pushed to become the permanent sculptor of one's own bodily

appearance, guided by one and the same aesthetic model" (Lipovetsky & Serroy 2013, 380-381).

Everlasting youth and everlasting life seem to be the utopian dream of today's man. Medicine and cosmetics have become beauty industries, promoting freshness, physical strength, and the power of seduction. Everyone is looking for a style that represents him in a convenient version, preferably retouched or augmented, folded on the model of the successful man and the impeccable body.

The emancipation of the body is also claimed out of non-aesthetic scruples. For example, the sick man fervently desires to free himself from the tyranny of an infirm or vulnerable body. However, the society of the "normals" takes out of the race the unattractive and undesirable bodies, even if science and technology continuously deliver therapies, remedies, prostheses, which can compensate certain forms of deficit. The elderly and the sick are housed in special institutions (asylums, hospitals...), intended for either temporary isolation or palliative care. Body obsolescence causes self-esteem and self-confidence, monotonously claimed in motivational discourses, to be seriously tested.

Invoking the right to difference, sexual minorities intervene on the body to bring it into harmony with the repressed self. Sexuality evades biological or hereditary determinism. Gender is not anatomically conditioned, but socially. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", wrote Simone de Beauvoir. A strange and unpredictable genetic lottery places female natures in men's bodies, male natures in women's bodies, or even mixes them both indecisively. In such cases, the conflicts between the body and the conscience acquire dramatic accents. Everyone wants to feel good in their own body, in their own skin. Identity camouflage solutions or surface rallies are felt as oppressive and repressive. Medicine, cosmetic surgery can intervene to reconcile the tensions or divergences arising from this sad game of masks. In happy cases, the body is modeled with the syringe and scalpel, to harmonize it with its own self. Are there solutions that exclude painful interventions? Of course... Abandoning stigma, accepting the difference, trying to put yourself, even temporarily, "in the other person's shoes."

9. *Aesthetics of care.* In his mature writings, Martin Heidegger postulated "anxiety" as the fundamental ontological coordinate of man. To give it its proper meaning, the philosopher proposes to focus the human being on an axis of "care" (Heidegger 1994, 190-192). In fact, it is an exhortation to return to the exigency of "self-concern" encountered in Greeks and in Latin Stoicism. Philosophers such as Epictetus, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius favor the search for self, recommending introspection, meditation, confessional retreats, inner dialogue. Such a preoccupation was consumed not in an

eminently abstract register, but in one of the self-imposed pagan experiences, which did not lack asceticism, obedience, silence, detachment, and, finally, "examinations of consciousness."

In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, Michel Foucault makes an excellent systematization of the "technologies of the self" practiced in Antiquity. The Greeks, for example, recommended *metanoia*, which meant both penitence, but also the radical change (metamorphosis) of thought and mind. By his exhortation to *epistrophê*, Plato aimed to divert the gaze from appearances, to detach the soul from the body, from the body-prison or from the body-grave (Foucault 2004, 204-205). In the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, self-conversion meant liberation from what we could not control or dominate. It is not a release from the body, but an effort to establish an appropriate relationship between the Self and the Self itself. In this context, knowledge is no longer the essential element; it is more the exercise, the practice, the training, the asceticism that are oriented towards a noble, edifying goal. To the Hellenistic Stoics, "conversion of gaze" meant looking away from others, turning away from the things of this world, looking at yourself (Foucault 2004, 213).

Philosophy is gradually evading the sphere of abstractions inadequate to current problems, becoming – for skeptics, Stoics and Epicureans – a true way of life (Hadot 2019). In turn, the philosopher becomes a "master of formation through subjectivization" – in the words of the same Foucault –, concerned with providing useful advice or exhortations to the common man. A true "existential aesthetics" favors the requirement to "live beautifully," in a hedonic manner common to both soul (spirit) and body. Condensed, laconic formulas summarized true "existential" programs, from which novices learned that what matters is not how long you live, but how you live; that you must not long for inaccessible things; that it is good not to long for what you cannot have; that you should live every day as if it is your last; that the ideal would be to live and cherish every moment unconditionally...

10. *The "artification" of the body, life, and self.* The demand for "self-care" and for others will be resumed in three particularly influential projects in contemporary art and philosophy that aim to transform into art their own body (*body art*), their own life (M. Foucault), their own Self (R. Schusterman).

The history of art captures the transition from the simple pictorial, sculptural, graphic or photographic representation of the body to its transformation into a work of art. An entire critical and illustrative literature describes the stages of this mutation; only passingly mention the books of some Paul Ardenne (Ardenne 2001), Sally O'Reilly (O'Reilly 2010), Victor

Ieronim Stoichiță (Stoichiță 2020), relevant for the way they capture the new artistic hypostases of the body – painted, tattooed, decorated and/or augmented.

Contemporary *body art* transforms the body into an object of art. The 60's exalts the mutilated, wounded, flogged body, the bleeding flesh, provocatively exposed. It is the revolt of the organic against the "purist" conventions, favorable to appearance and bodily surface. The Frenchwoman Orlan demystifies the idea of artificially augmented female beauty, through painful interventions on her own body, presented as a "work of art." It is not the skin that matters, just what is underneath. Gina Pane resorts to violent gestures on her own body: cuts, stings, rituals meant to suppress mediation: "my body in action is not only in the relationship, but the relationship itself." Experiences such as tattoos, piercings, scarifications (cuts and scarring of the skin) have allowed analogies between body art and primitive art. (Bejan 2012, 54-57).

The idea of a life conceived in the pattern of the "work of art" had been formulated in the 1980s by Michel Foucault, who, in a public conference for American students, denounced the exclusive reporting of artists to external objects, ignoring the most important thing: life itself. Foucault argues in favor of an "aesthetics of existence" characterized by "self-care." Everyone can become a "worker" dedicated entirely to the beauty of their own lives. Thus, a rhetoric of authenticity and return to the Self is activated, subsumed by an ideology of personal fulfillment and emancipation – obviously dominant at the beginning of the last century, but with a somewhat more distant antecedent.

The dandyism of the 19th century, for example, sought to "everydayz" the experience of art, translating it in terms of style. What is a *dandy*? English invention of the end of the 18th century, then borrowed by the French and transformed into a style or "way of life," practiced even today. Dandy is the character who makes it possible "to cultivate the idea of beauty in their persons" (Baudelaire). An aristocracy of bold and ostentatious style takes shape. Dandyism imposes itself as a "doctrine of difference and appearance." Its hidden purpose? "The dandy must aspire to be constantly sublime: he must live and sleep in front of a mirror," to remain trapped – seductive and destructive –. The ethics of these people is clearly narcissistic, of excessive singularity and negativity, consumed – sadly or tragically – in revolt, opposition, and loneliness. Dandy, the guy, has crises and identity disorders: he is usually the visibly effeminate, egotistical, misogynistic, unmarried, homosexual, self-concerned, "manly," and artificial. The real dandy "aestheticizes" his gestures in the smallest details; for him, "to appear means to be" (Barbey d'Aureville), consecrating the final triumph of masks and surfaces. For him, emancipation means both access

to culture, to beauty, to art, in order to raise to maximum level the quality of life, to make it sublime. *Vivere artisticamente* is both an ideal and accessible fact – at least in an assumption free of prejudices (Bejan 2014, 215-217; 220-221).

The idea of making changing the Self into an "work of art" is encountered in the writings of Richard Schusterman (Schusterman 2007). The somatic aesthetics proposed by him has as object the body, as it is perceived by everyone, to offer pleasant sensations or beautiful representations. The body is a place of sensory aesthetic appreciation and creative self-modeling. By recognizing the aesthetic function of the body, we can better capitalize on its potential.

Pragmatist somatic aesthetics has a prescriptive character, proposing models to follow and methods to improve the body "shape," simultaneously with mind education exercises. Some ("representational") methodologies focus exclusively on the external shape of the body, on its surface aestheticization. This includes sophisticated make-up and maintenance practices, plastic surgery, *body-building* techniques. On the other hand, "experiential" methodologies focus primarily on the aesthetic quality of the internal experience, encouraging oriental meditative practices (yoga, for example). A third possibility is offered by *performative* aesthetics (practice); it implies disciplines specifically dedicated to strength (force) and body health (martial arts, athletics, gymnastics, weightlifting). The stake of these approaches would be the experience of someone's own body, perceived from within, in terms of satisfaction and beauty (Bejan 2014, 222-225).

In *Body Consciousness* (Schusterman 2007), the American philosopher shows that somatic aesthetics is not intended exclusively for private space. Widely accepted, somatic practices produce political effects in the immediate reality. Somatic aesthetics broadens the consciousness and reflective part of our behavior, in order to be able to improve our own perceptions and actions. Explicit awareness of spontaneous habits is useful to stimulate new thinking, to increase flexibility, mobility, and creativity of the spirit. The continuous "stylization" of the Self through body modeling, even if it discharges a utopian scent, is an upheld idea. And maybe to be applied.

11. *Body as a gift*. Although a venerable tradition presents the body as a "puppet" of consciousness, the idea that, in fact, the body also influences or determines the contents of consciousness is becoming more and more pronounced. Gender, anatomical parameters of the body, age, health are necessarily outlined and cannot be changed by simple interventions at the level of consciousness. Moreover, this is not a vigilant and efficient guard all the time. It is no less true that by premeditatedly acting on ourselves, we can

shape or "stylize" in a convenient way our body, our consciousness, our Self, our life.

Personal narcissism, the pleasure of contemplating in the mirror, although natural, should not, I think, be exaggerated; also, no excessive reference to himself. For man, the body is a given or a *gift*, of nature, of love or of God, and must be taken as such, without making it the field of all possible experiments. Even if everyone seeks to feel good "in his own skin," it would not be bad to try sometimes to put ourselves, discreetly and comprehensively, "in the skin of others." Maybe in this way we will dissipate less in the "aestheticization" of appearances, nor will we long with so much zeal for what we cannot have anyway – eternal flawless health, beauty, happiness.

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