

BOOK REVIEW

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EMANATIONS OF THE BODY OR WHATEVER WE GET

Monika Banaś, Katarzyna Warmińska (eds.), *Kulturowe emanacje ciała* [*Cultural Emanations of the Body*], Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2011, 169 pages

The reviewed book is one of several titles raising the issue of corporeality, which have appeared on the Polish publishing market over the last few years. The body has become a fashionable subject of academic inquiries and everyone knows it is worth writing about it, or even necessary to do so. Unfortunately, more often than not after reading collections of such texts one gets the impression that their authors were ordered to write something about the body, and then the texts were gathered, randomly ordered and sent for printing. The book *Kulturowe emanacje ciała* [*Cultural Emanations of the Body*] is similar in this respect. Although its editor, Monika Banaś, claims in the preface that ‘articles in this collection have been grouped according to a certain idea’ (p. 11), the idea is known only to the editorial team. The articles in the book vary largely, including some true gems. However, there are also a few typical ‘fillers’, the only aim of which seems to be increasing the book’s length. Still, just like it is worth writing about the body, it is worth writing about books about the body, or even necessary to do so.

According to the promise made in the *Preface*, the first text in the book, Tadeusz Paleczny’s *Ciało w kulturze* [*Body in culture*] is supposed to be a cross-sectional, multi-layered introduction to “diverse ways of conceptualising body” (p. 11) and a kind of a “companion to issues concerning the relationships between the body and culture” (p. 11). After such a recommendation, readers can feel a bit disappointed, as the text provides them only with a clearly Christian

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perspective on the perception of corporeality. And although the author quotes supporters of the rightness of such an analysis, apart from St. Augustine, St. Thomas and St. Francis, Edward Hall is the only non-saint voice in the text. Still, even the Christian interpretation of corporeality presented in the article is not free from errors. "In Christianity, the body is a barrier on the way to salvation. Because of the inclination to do evil, given to people by God after the original sin was committed, the body drags us downwards, to the mystical hell and the sin of indulging the senses" (p. 18). Whereas the already mentioned St. Augustine would agree with such an interpretation, after the Second Vatican Council, such John Paul II's encyclicals as *Familiaris consortio* and *Redemptor Hominis*, or even his *Man and Woman He Created them*, the Christian proposal of understanding the body grants corporeality with dignity and God's love, no longer perceiving it only as a prison for the soul in this vale of tears. This refreshed look at human corporeality is also referred to by Krzysztof Walczyk S.J., an author of a different article in the book: "Christian anthropology strongly emphasises that the whole man, together with his body and soul, was created by God as good" (p. 61).

Tadeusz Paleczny lists questions that have bothered the human race „since the dawn of time”. The list is long but one of the questions is really puzzling: „What is the meaning of the identities of transsexuals, homosexuals and paedophiles?” (p. 16). Why such a comparison? Why the identity of these people is a problem to the questioner? Indeed, the question is intriguing but probably not for the reasons it was asked by its author. The second part of the text is definitely more secular, touching upon the issue of the cultural experience of corporeality. The author presents there, among other things, a concept of four types of culturally sanctioned distance zones, distinguished by Edward Hall. However, it is surprising that a supposedly cross-sectional and multi-layered introduction to ‘different ways of conceptualising the body’ (p. 11) lacks even a brief presentation of the most significant theoretical concepts of the body and corporeality, as seen by anthropology, sociology and philosophy.

Biologiczne aspekty starzenia się [*Biological aspects of ageing*] by Elżbieta Pyza is a kind of report on the current medical knowledge concerning the reasons and mechanisms of human ageing. The language of the article may be a challenge to potential readers of the collection.

Probably all organisms have their own genetic programme, determining the length of development, reproductive period and life. This programme consists of a number of processes which regulate the proliferative ability of cells, which means their ability to divide and to substitute old cells with new, their response to the oxidative stress and other types of stress, and their ability to produce energy and degrade damaged proteins, organelles or whole cells (pp. 30–31).

Still, this is a challenge that can be met and is worth rising to. The author competently introduces readers to the issue of the organism's biological ageing,

which is an unusual perspective for humanists. Such texts make researchers submerged in theoretical deliberations aware of the biological nature of the subject of their inquiries and allow the body to regain its meaty, bloody, cellular and mortal nature. However, there is one curious subchapter of the article, entitled *Jak jest postrzegana starość?* [*How is old age perceived?*], where Elżbieta Pyza touches upon the issue of the elderly people's social functioning. A half a page of text leaves readers, who hungrily devour the fragment they can finally understand with ease, unsatisfied. The subject is treated so sketchily that perhaps it would have been better to omit it altogether or – in order to satisfy the readers' discursive habits – describe it far more extensively.

Poza ciałem i nadmiernie w ciele – ciało w zaburzeniach psychicznych. Odwołanie się do prac Antoniego Kępińskiego [*Beyond the body and overly in the body – the body in mental disorders. A reference to Antoni Kępiński's work*] by Piotr Waław Gorczyca and Jarosław Sobiś leaves me with two questions: *who?* and *what for?* The reviewed collection does not provide a list of authors of individual articles, which had been a successful practice for years, allowing readers – especially in the case of such discursively heterogeneous publications – to check who speaks to them. The editorial team of *Kulturowe emanacje ciała* [*Cultural Emanations of the Body*] did not include even the information about the authors' institutional affiliation. I'm raising this issue because I believe the information who writes about what is indispensable. You read an article written by clinical practitioners who found inspiration in Kępiński's texts for their work with patients in a different way than an article, the authors of which are psychologists whose work is based on empathic, linguistic, direct contacts with patients, which is still different from a text written by academics who have not been in a professional relation connected with helping others for a very long time or who have never experienced it. Of course, boundless Internet provides confused readers with necessary information, but this is not the point. It is good when an article inspires for research, but it should not concern the information who the authors are. That's all about *who?* The other question is far more problematic and cannot be resolved so easily. I think the article's title could be much shorter: *Antoni Kępiński was a great professor*. The authors present Kępiński's deliberations concerning the presence of the body in mental disorders. However, they limit themselves to recounting his views on the issue, taken from a number of texts. But not only on this issue. There is something about the doctor-patient relationship, something about the criticism of methods used by other psychiatrists (such as an experiment), something about the body and eyes, and somewhere in between of all this there are a few examples based on authors' own observations (although their role is unknown), which can hardly be connected with the rest of the argument. Józef Tischner, vaguely mentioned in a footnote, barely makes it to the text body, although his version of the philosophy of dialogue and the face metaphor obviously converge with Kępiński's findings. Furthermore, anyone who has ever had to (or wanted to)

write an academic paper knows that the synonyms of such words as author, article and 'issue present many problems. In order to avoid the name "Kępiński", the authors use the word "professor". This probably unjustified familiarity can be treated as a violation of certain unwritten rules. Unfortunately, not everyone is like Aristotle, who can be easily substituted in a text by a Stagirite. The problem of *the bodily self* in mental disorders is a fascinating and multidimensional problem. It would be difficult to talk about disorders or changes in this dimension of identity in the case of mental illnesses as such. Antoni Kępiński is surely a figure worthy of interest, but it was him, and not the issue suggested by the title, who became an indisputable hero of the text.

"Faults, generalisations and simplicity of explanations, the tendency to connect the ugliness of an »outside man« with immorality and an inclination towards crime, and the attempts at eliminating *the unattractive* from the society, derived from this tradition, have compromised physiognomy. Regardless of this, its history tells the story of looking for answers to questions concerning the human nature and the discovering of a man in his body" (p. 57). In her text *Ciało a usposobienie duchowe. O fizjognomicie antropologicznie* [*The body and the spiritual disposition. About physiognomy from the anthropological perspective*], Renata Hołda presents the nearly forgotten art of assessing a person's character based on their face. The author discusses 19th-century physiognomic handbooks, at the same time referring to a tradition dating back to the antiquity, which was a way leading to such a strategy of getting to know people in a "scientific" way. The article is a fascinating read not only because of its topic and the way it is presented. It is written in beautiful Polish, and so reading it is an exceptional pleasure.

Cielesność uduchowiona. Religijne dylematy bohaterów biblijnych w malarstwie Rembrandta [*Spiritual corporeality. Religious dilemmas of biblical characters in Rembrandt's paintings*] by Krzysztof Walczyk S.J. is an interesting lecture setting biblical images of the Dutch artist in the context of Christian anthropology. "Rembrandt was fascinated by moments of revelation, situations when the divine and human elements were confronted. He showed it in a unique way through the spirituality of people he painted and their openness to human activities" (p. 62). The analysis conducted by the author is convincing and evocative. It is obviously supported by an in-depth study of the subject literature and Rembrandt's works. The only reason to complain is the lack of reproductions, which would involve the readers in the process of works' interpretation. Of course, this is just meaningless wishful thinking, taking into consideration the commonly known realities of publishing academic works.

Ciało w przestrzeni architektonicznej [*Body in the architectural space*] by Piotr Winskowski is an erudite disquisition on the ever-changing presence of the body in the space created by people. "Architectural forms rarely copy literal body shapes, and so architecture is not the centre of attention of the body art.

At the same time, it strongly influences and affects people through their bodies in a number of ways, even if it happens indirectly. [...] The cognitive mind is a part of the body, while architecture as a source of cognition and language used for this cognition are transmitted to the mind with the use of sensory responses of our bodies to the space around them” (p. 76). The author competently combines old strategies of transforming or shaping space with modern architectural solutions. He depicts interiors (and exteriors) in a very evocative way. The author of this review confirms the aptness of his comments, being still much impressed by the exhibition *The Monumental Theatre of Stanisław Wyspiański*, described in the text. Michelangelo, Le Corbusier, the Gate of Dawn, ancient Egypt and the latest architectural works intertwine in the article, yet they do not give the impression of chaos or excess. *Toutes proportions gardées!*

In his article *Uciekając z pułapki ciała – kino Davida Cronenberga* [*Escaping the trap of the body – David Cronenberg’s cinema*], Piotr Kletkowski carefully and expertly leads the readers through the bodily hell of the director’s films. The content-related polemics with the author requires extremely extensive knowledge of cinematography and in-depth knowledge of Cronenberg’s filmography. There are cases when after reading a text one has to rely on an impression, which is not always supported with solid insight into the issue, but it is impossible to be an expert in everything. Thus, I can only say that after reading Piotr Kletkowski’s text one craves for at least a peep at the world he described. Meanwhile, I shall let the author speak:

The essence of Cronenberg’s film world is looking for answers to questions that still torment us even if they were already answered a long time ago. How to pass something that seems impassable? How to get away from the trap of the body when one negates the existence of the spiritual sphere? Isn’t this very attempt an indication of the existence of something that contradicts biology? [...] His creative doubts give rise to further film visions that disturb emotions and intellect. (p. 97)

Jarosław Rokicki and Aleksandra Gruszczyk’s pretext for writing the text *Ja przeciwko mnie. Rozważania o urzeczowieniu ciała* [*Me against myself. Deliberation on the objectification of the body*] was a thesis of a recent graduate from the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, Alina Żemojdzin, the confusion the thesis created and the media storm caused by a journalist of the local branch of „Gazeta Wyborcza”. „The objects being the artistic medium were cosmetics made of – according to the artist – human fat, obtained during liposuction” (p. 99). The association of the project with the practice of producing soap from human fat in the Gdańsk shop of professor Rudolf Spanner, exposed by Zofia Nałkowska, led to cancelling the young artist’s exhibition in the Łaźnia Centre for Contemporary Art. The authors of the article, starting with the situation presented above, ponder over the issue of objectification of the body in modern art. The effect of these deliberations the readers are presented with, despite its difficult and *heavy* topic,

is a very satisfying essay, outlining the context of consumerist culture and the place of art and body in the marketised social space.

Elżbieta Wiącek, the author of the article *Ciało jako tworzywo sztuki. Rytuały Mariny Abramović* [*Body as an artistic material. Marina Abramović's rituals*], had quite a simple task. A relatively well-written account of Abramović's performance art is enough for everyone to read it with a flush on their cheeks. She is one of the most fascinating artistic figures of the second half of the 20th century, and so she usually defends herself. The author presents a few most famous performances of the artist in a skilful and evocative way, setting them in the context of the multidimensionality of the body, as well as the strategies of using the body in social life and, naturally, art. „The foundations for *performance art* are the elements of the existing reality: human relationships, values, ideologies and political systems. [...] through performance art the body occupies the public space; on behalf of the private space, it claims the right to determine itself as a bodily territory. Because of strong relationships with social, political and cultural realities *performance art* has become a kind of sociological margin of art” (p. 108).

Małgorzata „Malwina” Niespodziewana's *Ciało uniwersalne w sztuce* [*Universal body in art*] is a kind of artistic manifesto of the author, who is looking for the title universal body in her works. It is difficult to review a manifesto, yet this one is very consciously rooted in previous artistic proposals, as well as anthropological and philosophical concepts. The author states that “a universal body consists of its elements and parts all people have, regardless of their skin colour or gender. And this includes blood, hair and tears” (p. 119).

Joanna Dziadowiec's *Ciało w tańcu. Rozważania z perspektywy folkloru góralskiego* [*Body and dancing. Deliberations from the perspective of the highland folklore*] is merely a correct school essay. The text was certainly created by a person who has a passion, but it was written so neatly and in accordance with the rules, that it takes a lot of effort to find this passion. There are many references to textbooks, numerous quotations and names (including some very important), but the article lacks lightness and ease. This is all the more visible in confrontation with effervescent traditional highland dance most of the text is devoted to. I guess writing about dance is like dancing about science, but this energy disproportion is painfully visible. And yet, despite the correctness and neatness of the disquisition, the author managed to blend Stanisław and Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz into one person, which perhaps would be acceptable within the previously mentioned Małgorzata „Malwina” Niespodziewana's concept of a universal body, but history allowed only one of them to write *On the Pass*.

The last two text – *Ciało w koncepcji Michela Foucaulta* [*Body in Michel Foucault's concept*] by Jarosław Rokicki and *Chrześcijaństwo a ciało – realne, mistyczne, polityczne* [*Christianity and the real, mystical, political body*] by Piotr Napiwodzki O.P. – although remote, they are an account of a certain state

of affairs, a report of Michel Foucault's and the Catholic Church's thoughts on the body. Both articles are short, and their authors present fragments of the current knowledge of the body. Of course, such diligent, concise reporting is desirable, but it can get lost among longer, critical texts containing author's comments.

Kulturowe emanacje ciała is a very heterogeneous environment, with which readers have to cope, but if they try to find a common denominator for the presented texts or to grasp the collection's keynote, they will be at loss. From the linguistic point of view, the difference between a collection and a motley collection is not larger than between S. Witkiewicz and S.I. Witkiewicz, and yet in both cases the differences seem to be fundamental. Texts in publications of numerous authors are usually diverse. Some of them are merely correct, some poor, and some really remarkable. But the task of the editorial team is to determine the subject, profile or at least the direction of the collection's articles. Still, in many cases – and this book seems to be one of them – random tactics is used, and so they print whatever they get.