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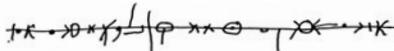
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Introduction

Historicizing the Body



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This collection of original studies is intended to bring a contribution to the field of “body studies” and the cultural history of the body. Mediated through language, disciplined by sciences, placed under political control and the medium of social relations, the body continues to escape the rigors of discourses and representations. Therefore, under the title *Bodies / Matter: Narratives of Corporeality*, several articles, field notes, exhibitions and book reviews examine the ways in which the human body has been visually and narratively represented in different historical and scientific contexts. Through its multi-disciplinary perspective at the intersection of anthropological, sociological and historical reflection, the volume aims to explore how the concept of corporeality has been imagined in relation to identity, how it was shaped by scientific perspectives and how it was staged within exhibitions or artistic experiments. Beyond academic curiosity, the volume is linked to a growing interest in the body in contemporary society, which becomes – in the words of the sociologist Brian Turner – the “main field of cultural and political activity” in a “somatic society”.

The volume is the result of a journey which started in May 2014 with a conference organized at the Faculty of

History, University of Bucharest. The goal of the event was to bring together Romanian specialists from the field of humanities and social sciences and to promote the “body studies” as a strong field of research within this local context. The cultural history of the body has been an intensely researched domain in the academia in the last couple of decades. Modernity opened the body as a field of study, paving the way to deconstruct its meanings and layers. The first generation of the Annales school (Mark Block), the postwar social history, historical demography and cultural anthropology (Mary Douglas and Victor Turner), or the history of medicine (Charles Rosenberg, Georges Canguilhem) placed high interest in the political symbolism of the human body (Kantoroviz), the health of the population in history, the status of the human body in the development of medical sciences or the different meanings the human body is invested with in local cultures (Jenner and Taithe 2003, 187-191). However, the “history of the body” emerged as an autonomous field of academic inquiry, becoming the “historiographical dish of the day” (Roy Porter *in* Cooter 2010, 393) in the last decades of the 20th century (Jenner and Taithe 2003, 190-191). This advent is explained (Cooter 2010; Jenner and Taithe 2003) or prefigured (Duden 1990, 1-49) in the context of the general





development of the post-Marxist, post-structuralist and feminist historiography. The emergence of the “history of the body” as a new and diffuse domain of cultural history drawing from literary approaches to social constructivist traditions was made possible by the historicization of the human body, along the postmodernist lines set by the linguistic turn and New Historicism, greatly indebted to historical anthropology, Foucault’s historical epistemology, feminist studies and cultural history. As Cooter puts it:

“Situating bodies historically in their appropriate ‘representational regimes’ was part and parcel of the re-thinking of the meaning, purpose and shape of history. Increasingly, therefore, history (as in the history of the body) was approached as a text: authored, discursive, and malleable in every respect. It was as a made up text that it became a resource for (historical) constructivist and (literary) deconstructivist analysis, neither of which was any longer very separable.” (Cooter 2010, 397)

Thus, after authors such as Marcel Mauss and Norbert Elias introduced the body in the history of mentalities, Michel Foucault highlighted the way in which bodies have been used as a predilect place for the manifestation of modern state control over the individual, while Pierre Bourdieu explored the way in which social norms are appropriated in and through performing bodies. Feminist critic Judith Butler made us doubt that sex is a natural category and showed how gender is a learnt quality, while sociologists Brian Turner and Chris Shilling have highlighted the multitude of significances the human body acquires in the definition of a modern individual. Researchers have explored the history of collecting and dissecting human bodies, of gazing and learning from bodies, of constructing bodies in a capitalistic society, or breaking them down as commodities.

Nevertheless, the endurance of the

“history of the body” as an autonomous field of academic inquiry seems to be threatened not only by the changing historiographical context, but also by the methodological dilemmas and contradictions of the field itself, torn among representationalists (e.g. Laquer 1991), experientialists (e.g. Duden 1987) or idealists (Jenner and Taithe 2003, 194-197; Cooter 2010, 398). The emergence of the “material turn” in historiography could be seen as a compromise meant to rescue the “human body” from the return to a pure a-historical biological essentialism.

However, in Romania, this area of research is yet to be fully developed as standing on its own. Thus far, the interest has mostly been occasional, with very few researchers identifying themselves as specialists in the related fields. Among notable contributions¹, in the sociology of the body, we would like to mention the works of Gabriel Jderu focusing on motorcyclists’ bodies, Ramona Marinache’s study of the body asleep, Laura Grunberg and the body of fighters investigated by Alexandru Dincovici; in cultural and medical anthropology – Andrei Mihail, Valentin-Veron Toma and Elena Bărbulescu. More studies focused on the construction of bodies have been in the area of medical history (Daniela Sechel, Constantin Bărbulescu, Lidia Trăușan-Matu, Octavian Buda, Adrian Majuru), the history of sexuality (Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu), the history of eugenics (Marius Turda, Maria Bucur, Tudor Georgescu), the history of childhood (Nicoleta Roman, Simona Preda), gender studies (Mihaela Miroiu, Luciana Jînga, Oana Băluță, Maria Bucur), the history of criminology (Corina Doboș, Gabriel Constantinescu) and the history of reproductive policies in communist Romania (Gail Kligman).

The studies in this volume cover a wide range of these fields, from history, anthropology, art history and literary studies. They all share an anti-essentialist

1) This is by no means an exhaustive list. On the other hand, there are numerous other researchers who have approached the body in their studies, but either it is not the main focus of their study, or their interest has been only occasional.

perspective on the human body, conceived as a historical artifact, a discursive construction at the intersection of inner experiences and societal projections, permanently negotiated and (re)invested with meaning. This perspective does privilege the historicity of both matter and representations: neither substance, nor its form are given entities with a “natural” existence, as the volume shows that form and matter are intertwined and historically determined.

The opening section, **Bodies as Scientific Objects at the Turn of the Century**, will focus on processes that have **objectified the body**, as part of scientific or legal practices. In Baudrillard’s words (1981), “mummies don’t rot from worms: they die from being transplanted from a slow order of the symbolic, master over putrefaction and death, to an order of history, science, and museums.” The articles signed by Oana Mateescu, Alexandra Ion and Corina Doboş examine such processes, more specifically, the way the human body is subjected to the exercise of power and control, and what was / is an individual becomes a specimen open to scientific questioning, subjected to manipulation and used to produce knowledge. Case studies address unpublished or unique archival material, which highlight the way the materiality of body has been closely constructed in relation to scientific paradigms in the first four decades on the 20th century: from the phenomena of materialization studied by Austrian baron Albert von Schrenck-Notzing to the history of the first anthropological collection in Romania, that of Francis I. Rainer and the construction of the criminal body in interwar Romania.

The second section of the volume, **In Sickness and in Health: The Medical Body**, gathers three contributions that explore different aspects of the medicalized body, the contributions of Constantin Bărbulescu, Zsuzsa Bokor and Andrei

Mihail. All three articles tackle with the human body as objectified by the medical gaze, produced by the medical discourse and subjected to medical and political intervention, in different times and settings of modern and contemporary Romanian history, showing how these medical constructions translate specific professional objectives, social hierarchies and political interests. In addition, Andrei Mihail’s anthropological study gives the perspective on the subjective, corporeal experience of the lived, “real” body. Together with Anca-Maria Pănoiu’s notes on the field, dealing with the experience of pain, this study represents an attempt to depart from a purely representationalist or social-constructivist approach of the medical body, bringing into the picture the patients’ subjective bodily experiences.

Corporeality: From Performance to Representation, the third section of the volume reunites four studies inquiring different representations and postures of the human body, in different historical times and settings: mastering the Old Hebrew language, Raluca Boboc investigates the representations of the human body in the Jewish book of Proverbs, while Cristina Bogdan focuses on the feminine representations of the sin in the 18th century iconography from Transylvania. Closer to our times, Melinda Blos-Jáni explores the visual culture of early 20th century Transylvania, as expressed in home movies. Laura Grünberg makes an excellent synthesis of various dimensions in understanding identity in a contemporary setting: a view of the body placed at the cross-road of the state’s control, of new technologies and scientific perspectives. As Barthes would say: “Which body are we talking about today?”

The museology section, **The body on Display**, contains two recent exhibition reviews: one (“The House of the Soul”) addressing a project by Cosmin Manolache



and Lila Passima focused around an “alms house”, a house for the dead; the second one is signed by Gabriela Nicolescu Cristea, a visual anthropologist, in conversation with a curator (Lila Passima) and a documentarist (Corina Doboş) of an exhibition on abortions during Ceauşescu’s regime (“Cei din Lume fără Nume” / “Nameless in the World”), displayed at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant at the end of 2012. They are accompanied by pictures from the two exhibitions (courtesy of Lila Passima, Cosmin Manolache and Mihai Bodea), collated by Lila Passima and Cosmin Manolache.



In the fifth section, **Field Notes on Corporeality**, we grouped together three researchers who are presenting original fieldwork: Jana Al Obeidyine’s auto-ethnography on dance transmission and revival of history through the body, Mirela Bănică’s notes on the performed body of the pilgrim, and Anca-Maria Pănoiu’s anthropological investigation in the

experience of pain in disabled patients.

Lastly, the readers can find two captivating book reviews by Călin Cotoi and Lidia Trăuşan-Matu.

Furthermore, the volume contains an important visual insert, comprising images from the archive of the Institute of Anthropology “Francisc I. Rainer”, some of which have never been published before (more about the context and content of this archive and collection in Ion 2015, this volume). These are some of the first anthropological photographs in Romania, showing living or dead subjects, and depicting: peasants from Drăguş (Transilvania) and Fundul-Moldovii (Bucovina) villages taken during Francisc I. Rainer’s field campaigns in 1927-1928 and 1932 along the Social Romanian Institute, subjects from Maria Dumitrescu’s studies, criminals skulls (possibly a gift from Dr Nicolae Minovici) and undated images of archaeological specimens.

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