

Challenges of Life

Essays on philosophical and cultural anthropology

Edited by
Gert Melville and Carlos Ruta

Volume 2

Thinking the Body as a Basis, Provocation and Burden of Life



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Edited by
Gert Melville and Carlos Ruta

Editorial Manager
Laura S. Carugati

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Basic perspectives

Sandro Chignola

Body Factories

For Rob and Khaled

Let me take it from a distance. Both the term *corpus* and the Greek word σῶμα have a quite clouded origin. *Corpus*, it is supposed, might be the lengthening of the root **kṛp-*, certified in Indo-iranian, where it means ‘form’ or ‘beauty’. What is more evident is the symmetry of its usage in Latin and in Greek. In Homer σῶμα always refers to an inanimate body, to the corpse. But when it is about a living body, he uses δέμας. Δέμας is an interesting term: as Benveniste explains, it is a development of the ancient verbal root **dem-* that means ‘to build’, from which derive both the ‘political’ terms related to the house (the Iranian form –*dam*; the Latin *domus*), for example δεσπότης (master), δμῶς (servant) ο δμωή (handmaid), and the very word δέμας, that designates the form or the visible and bodily appearance, the ‘building’, of an animate living being. In Latin such terminological opposition – between σῶμα and δέμας – is expressed by opposing *corpus* and *anima*, the principle that moulds inert matter. Thence another consideration. *Corpus* is not only the corpse, a man’s or an animal’s dead body, in analogy to σῶμα, but also the Latin word for any material object in a much larger sense – “*omnes quod potest uideri corpus dicitur*”¹ –, as well as any aggregate of parts, by extension, once it has taken shape². *Corporo* means in the first place: I kill, I make or I supply a corpse.

But if conjugated in the passive voice, the verb *corporare* – that means to take on the appearance, the form *corporis* – stands for incarnating, embodying, materializing. Hence derive the political terms *corporatus*, *corporatio* and the verbal forms *concorporo*, *incorporo*, which refer not only to the compound in which the parts are summed up, but also to the vital principle that animates them. *Anima*, *animal*: another semantics, on which I cannot focus now. Let us simply point out that the lexicon of the organic and of the organism, to which the metaphorical and conceptual field of ‘political life’³ goes back, stems from the opposition between inanimate and animate matter – in other words, it is activated by the breath (ψυχή in Greek, that means ‘blow’ and ‘wind’, earlier that ‘soul’), by an

1 MAURUS SERVIUS HONORATUS, *Commentary on the Aeneid of Vergil*, 6, 303.

2 See Pierre CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire étimologique de la langue grecque*, vol. I, 1083–1084; Alfred ERNOUT, Alfred MEILLET, *Dictionnaire étimologique de la langue latine*, 144–146; Émile BENVENISTE, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*. I warmly thank Lorenzo Rustighi, Girolamo De Michele, Sandro Mezzadra.

3 It is enough the reference to ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, 1253a, 1281b.

animator that gives life to it – where it is a directive element, a motional principle, somewhat exceeding the inertia of the latter, that bestows ‘organicity’ upon the body⁴. Soul: ἀρχή of the living beings, for Aristotle⁵.

I begin to get closer. In Elizabethan England, the jurists of the Crown found the best formula to solve the problem of the *body politic*’s continuity. It is the theory of the King’s two bodies. “The King has in himself two bodies”, they agreed in a declaration made at Serjeant’s Inn to justify the king’s full power even when he has not yet reached maturity, “a Body natural and a Body politic”. The king’s natural body is a mortal body, “subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident”; his political body, instead, “consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public Weal”, is incorruptible, not subject to imperfection, nor can it be affected by decay or infirmity. It is perfectly separated from the natural body⁶.

It is well known that such juridical construction has been achieved in particular conditions, namely in order to legitimize the full exercise of regal power by Henry VIII’s successors: Edward, who was minor, Mary and Elizabeth, who were women. On the basis of the Christological paradigm, that is Christ’s double nature, the jurists of the Crown resolved the dualism between the doctrine of the *corporatio* – the political community’s supertemporal *corpus mysticum* – and the doctrine of the king’s *maiestas*, embodied time by time in a mortal body and in a physical person. To our purposes, it is important to note the theory of ‘migration’, by virtue of which the jurists carried out the *body politic*’s continuity after the king’s death. In English common law, the king’s death is not called ‘Death’, they remark according to the Plowden *Reports*, but “Demise”, because the monarchy’s political body does not die, and what the decease of the monarch’s physical person separates is just the king’s two bodies: the buried corpse belongs to the natural king, while his ‘Dignity’, the institution’s immortal ‘Soul’ transmigrates into his successor without interruption, thus reincarnating the body politic in a man of flesh and bone: “dignitas non moritur” (dignity does not die). Then again the kingdom’s *anima* and *corpus*.

This is not the place to follow the long story and all the implicit elements of such theory of the monarchic institution. As everybody knows, Ernst Kantorowicz has analysed its rituals, iconography and textual sources⁷. What interests me is rather the way Pierre Rosanvallon has referred to the same theory by studying another institution, namely the history of universal suffrage in France. Here we

⁴ See Adriana CAVARERO, “Il corpo politico come organismo”.

⁵ ARISTOTLE, *On the Soul*, 402 a7.

⁶ See Edmund PLOWDEN, *Commentaries or Reports*, 21–23.

⁷ Cf. Ernst KANTOROWICZ, *The King’s Two Bodies*.

take a third step closer to the topic on which I intend to focus on this occasion. There is a theological mechanism working in democratic elections too. Thomas Hobbes has expressed it quite clearly when in chapter XVI of *Leviathan* he introduced the modern concept of political representation, thus solving the dualism of corporative representation that up to then had permitted to figure the relationship between the Prince and the classes as a relationship of confrontation and resistance between distinct petitions⁸.

The sovereign represents the people's unity, and through his 'person' – a theatrical term, as Hobbes points out, that in Latin means 'mask' – he bestows upon it an existence that it does not have in itself. It is exactly in this sense that the sovereign makes the people and not the other way around, as it might appear according to the social pact's authorizing *fictio*⁹. The 'people's' unity is achieved, on the scene of the political theatre, through the representative act that gathers the scattered 'multitude' of individual wills where the corps and classes of the medieval *societas civilis sive politica* are dissolved; a dissolution that Hobbes equalizes to a pre-political state of nature. The 'Commonwealth' is a mystic body organized by the law, as the unique expression of the sovereign's representative will.

This complex changeover does not solely concern the absolutist political theology of sovereignty. On the contrary, such conversion, that in Hobbes opposes two terms – 'people' and 'multitude' – in order to dissociate the two stages of the pact for legitimation purposes, is reproduced and maintained throughout the history of democratic institutions. Pierre Rosanvallon, who finds in the universal suffrage the operator that accomplishes the progressive political integration of society, employs the metaphor of the king's two bodies to retrace the procedures through which the inequality that marks the raw materiality of social processes can be overtaken in the immaterial temporality of juridical equivalence. There are two bodies of the people all over the constitutional history of the nineteenth century, and the history of suffrage – a true technology of transformation of the people's body (filthy, indomitable, undisciplined body, to which between the 18th and 19th century the liberal and conservative political rhetoric refers with denigrating terms such as 'populace', 'plebe', 'mob', 'swinish multitude') into the nation's glorious body ('populus', 'people', 'peuple') – coincides with the transmutation of the first one into the second. Suffrage: the downright "Adel-brief des Volkes", as Heinrich von Treitschke calls it, highlighting its functions of 'ennoblement'¹⁰.

⁸ See Otto von Gierke, *Johannes Althusius*; Werner Näf, "Die Frühformen des modernen Staates im Spätmittelalter"; Hasso Hofmann, *Repräsentation*.

⁹ See Giuseppe Duso, *La rappresentanza politica*.

¹⁰ Heinrich von Treitschke, "Frankreichs Staatsleben und der Bonapartismus", 226.

It is not important here the fact that Rosanvallon's book represents a sort of specular reversal of young Marx's positions (*Zur Judenfrage*, 1844)¹¹. Nor the fact that he makes the apology of the process of de-politicization that during the long French Revolution drove the proletarians to lay down their arms by integrating themselves into the democratic play of elections and into the framework of equivalence, though merely formal, in order to ransom the imbalance of social processes by virtue of the voting right. What I find interesting here is rather how the metaphor of the people's two bodies – the 'citoyen's collective body and the 'prolétaire's natural and savage body – is reactivated in order to point out the opposition between 'form' and 'matter' of subjectivity, only seemingly resolved and redeemed in the inclusiveness of universal citizenship.

I shall finally get to the point. In this occasion I am interested in analysing another kind of opposition between the people's two bodies. Namely, what in the 19th century has been mostly brought back to the opposition between barbarians and workers, between the 'dangerous class' and the 'working class'¹². In other words, I am less interested in the political and constitutional register where this opposition has been worked out than in the preliminary way the body has been 'conceived' as a docile and useful body – that is to say designed, manufactured, outside of any mystique or juridical *fictio*.

In book one of *Capital* a series of expressions recurs that are relevant for the path we are following. The first one concerns Marx's use of Hobbes' terminology. The final point of Marx's 'Darstellung' is commodities. And it is for this reason that owners of commodities, in the market, make the scene as 'persons' who bring to life the network of contracts and juridical relationships that constitute the sphere of circulation. Marx employs Hobbes' expression to the letter. However the 'person', here, does not merely represent juridical equivalences, but the direct personification – the *Charaktermaske*, Marx writes – of capitalist economic processes¹³. This consequently means that anybody, not only the owner of commodities – the private will expressed by the contract – appears on the scene as the mirror of the productive relations that penetrate him¹⁴.

The second expression refers to the commodity form. Of course, it is no natural entity. Products only take the commodity form on the basis of a very specific mode or production, namely the capitalist mode of production. Commodities absorb a quite significant part of the history of capital. In order to have a

¹¹ Cf. Pierre ROSANVALLON, *Le sacré du citoyen*.

¹² See Louis CHEVALIER, *Classes laborieuses et classes dangereuses*; as for the metaphorical field of the 'barbarian' or the 'savage' see: Pierre MICHEL, *Les barbares, 1789–1848*.

¹³ Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 2, *Ware und Geld*.

¹⁴ See Luca BASSO, *Agire in comune*, 47; Sandro MEZZADRA, *Nei cantieri marxiani*.

commodity form, the product is required not to be produced “as direct means of subsistence for the producers themselves”, and a strict division of labour must be already established¹⁵.

The third expression refers to the fact that the conditions of existence of capital are not limited to the simple circulation of commodities and money. It only comes to life, thus marking an era of social production, when the owner of the means of production and subsistence finds the free wage-labourer as the seller of his own labour-power on the market. Marx defines labour-power as “a capacity, or power of the living individual” (that is to say something that “nur in seiner lebendigen Leiblichkeit existiert”)¹⁶.

“Lebendige Leiblichkeit”, Marx writes. ‘Leib’ in German is one of the two terms employed to identify the body. The other one is obviously ‘Körper’, whose Latin semantics is well known. ‘Leib’ on the contrary refers to the Gothic root **leif*, from which stem both the German ‘Leben’, and the English ‘life’¹⁷. Man has a ‘congenital’ labour-power, that allows him not only to produce what he needs for living, but also what makes it possible to restore the waste of “muscle, nerve, brain” that occurs in the process of production and that must be recovered in order that the labour cycle may restart the next moment.

Labour-power here evidently means something that comes before the organization of the working day and before it is ‘bought’ by the capitalist. As long as it is an aptitude implicit in the individual’s “lebendige Leiblichkeit”, it does not at all refer to a specific class of work activities (this or that work), but to a generic productive faculty that belongs to the human nature. Labour-power is therefore understood by Marx in the sense of Aristotle’s *dynamis*: as a potency or as a capability¹⁸. More precisely, as the “the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being” (“Inbegriff der physischen und geistigen Fähigkeiten, die in der Leiblichkeit, der lebendigen Persönlichkeit eines Menschen existieren”, he writes)¹⁹.

This point seems decisive to me. Here the question is about the specific human nature as a potency of relation as well as a potency of production. Marx properly uses the term “lebendige Leiblichkeit” to refer to that plastic tangle of forces that identifies the human being as a system of anatomic structures (“muscle, nerve”) and as a bundle of linguistic and cognitive dispositions (“brain”, Marx says). What

¹⁵ Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 4, *Verwandlung von Geld in Kapital*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁷ Friedrich KLUGE, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 565, 568; cf. REHBERG’s contribution in this volume.

¹⁸ See Paolo VIRNO, *Grammatica della moltitudine*, 82; Michel VADÉE, *Marx penseur du possible*.

¹⁹ Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 2, 181.

precedes the employment of the worker's body is the subjection of labour-power to capital, that means the achievement of the commanded conditions thanks to which that potentiality is turned into actuality. Then the capitalist does not buy this or that performance. He rather buys the indeterminate productiveness that is inscribed in human nature as a potency. The faculty to produce as such, not yet applied, is therefore the core of the exchange between the capitalist and the worker²⁰. As a matter of fact, the buying and selling activity does not concern an accomplished work – the actuality that fulfils the potentiality – but the generic productive *dynamis* that is immanent in life (*Leben*) and that the capitalist is able to put to work in order to extract a surplus value as long as it is held back in its own generality. The material substratum to which such potency belongs is man's living nature: that is to say what his body 'can' do – understood here as 'Leib' and not as 'Körper'.

Hence comes a series of relevant consequences. The first one is that what matters for the capitalist is not merely the labourer's 'body': his muscles or arms, the mere effort of which his body is capable. The body does not become an object to dominate for its intrinsic value – here lies part of the difference between the old economics of slavery and the the capitalist form of production – but exactly because it is the substratum of something immaterial, the labour-power, that coincides with the specific quality of human nature. As part of the critics has recently acknowledged, if the term bio-politics makes sense and can assume a 'categorical' value outside of Foucault's textual canon, it is properly in this direction that it takes on this task²¹. The potency to work, bought and sold like any other commodity, is a labour that has not yet been objectified but is nonetheless inseparable from the worker's immediate bodily existence, which is the second consequence. The third one is that throughout this connection Marx achieves a decisive stage of his 'Darstellung' – his 'exposition', according to Hegel's system – of the process of capital. The energetic expense that Marx refers to the body – "muscle, nerve and brain", the 'consumption' of labour-power that must be continuously restored in order for the process of reproduction to function – is at the same time the "process of production". In particular, it is about a production that does not peter out with the produced commodity but is ceaselessly valorised as surplus-labour supply, and therefore as a source of surplus-value ("Der Konsum-

²⁰ See Paolo VIRNO, *Grammatica della moltitudine*, 83.

²¹ See for example Paolo VIRNO, *Grammatica della moltitudine*, 84; Maurizio LAZZARATO, "Biopolitique / Bioéconomie"; Carlo VERCELLONE, ed., *Capitalismo cognitivo*; Andrea FUMAGALLI, *Bioeconomia e capitalismo cognitivo*; Michael HARDT and Antonio NEGRI, *Commonwealth*.

tionsprozeß der Arbeitskraft ist zugleich der Produktionsprozeß von Ware und von Mehrwert”, Marx writes)²².

A crucial transition is carried out here. From Hobbes’ theatre of circulation – the theatre where the buyer and the seller of commodities, even that particular commodity represented by labour-power, meet on the scene as *Charaktermasken* of the contract and of the exchange – we enter what Marx calls the “secret laboratory of production” (*die verborgene Stätte der Produktion*). Here, far below the sparkling sphere of simple circulation, where the premise of a perfect representative transparency prevails, as long as law translates the symmetry of will into the legitimate petition of exchange and the “innate rights of man” seem to enmesh and guarantee the entire process of negotiation, the “physiognomy of the ‘dramatis personae’” that had animated the first four chapters of *Capital* changes radically. The owner of money now comes forth as a capitalist, while the bare possessor of his own labour-power follows him as his labourer (*folgt ihm nach als sein Arbeiter*), and if the former smiles, the latter appears rather timid and holding back, “like one who is bringing his own hide to market and has nothing to expect but a hiding”²³.

One’s hide. One’s body, then. But on what conditions? What interests me now is this transition – that is not merely logic nor totally reducible to Marx’s ‘Darstellung’ of the process of accumulation, but takes places in ‘historical’ terms, namely as the subjection of society to capital. A transition that subdues the generic labour-power implicit in the human “lebendige Leiblichkeit” and turns it into the factory worker’s useful, docile and productive “Körper”.

In order to get to this point, though, another conceptual stage is required. The transition beyond the sphere of circulation (and beyond the contractual dynamics of the exchange of performances) opens up the way to the process of production. What means for Marx the valorisation that is achieved inside it. The capitalist transforms money into value by incorporating the living labour (*lebendige Arbeitskraft*) into the dead labour (*tote Arbeit*), that has been objectified in the factors of production which he deploys in order to produce surplus value. What is introduced into the process of production is therefore the potency of valorisation that is immanent in labour-power and allows the capitalist to profit on the invested capital, right because it is defined by the faculty to supply unpaid surplus labour. Dead labour brought to life: “ein beseeltes Ungeheuer”, as Marx calls it. Capital is like a “live monster that is fruitful and multiplies”²⁴.

²² Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 2, 189.

²³ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁴ Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 5, 209.

It is known that Marx has often used metaphors like this in his writings. Capital as a vampire or as a werewolf. Necropolitical figures, we may say, retrieving an expression that Achille Mbembe has forged for a different purpose²⁵. What Marx intends to highlight, as the reality that tears apart the mirror game produced by the fetishism of commodities, is the series originated by the inversion from which stems the capitalist process of production in its historical determination. The labourer, in flesh and bone, forced to sell “his own hide” to the capitalist through the buying and selling of performances, is subjected to the capitalist’s control, to whom belongs everything he produces, exactly like the time of production that exceeds the working day established by the salary. It is not the labourer who employs the objective factors of production, as it may appear in a naïve definition of labour; it is rather the dead labour, “crystallised” in capital, that “sucks living labour” by seizing its power of valorisation. Here does not only emerge the metaphorical field of the monstrous, but recurs the semantic field of the body from which we have started: the cadaverous ‘corpus’ of the factors of production gets ‘animated’ and in front of the worker – namely, the socialized worker whose life is subjected to the great factory system – raises the “productive organism that is purely objective” (*einen ganz objektiven Produktionsorganismus*²⁶) by virtue of which the class domination is reproduced – with the same tension that qualifies the living organism in Aristotle’s physics (matter, form, movement). The machinery system is an “Automat” for Marx. But this machinery is ‘animated’; the productive body, that the labourer discovers (*vorfindet*) as the bond that submits him, literally comes to life.

I intend to linger over this sequence. Because it displays a decisive problem for my argument. What interests me is how this changeover is accomplished and what it manifests. We have previously met the figure of the people’s two bodies, somewhat the ‘mean’ equivalent to the political theology of the king’s sovereignty and of the kingdom’s mystical body. In democracy, the electoral machinery achieves a similar welding by transforming the ‘populace’ of the streets – the gangs that haunted the nightmares of the 19th century bourgeois literature – into the bright sovereign ‘people’, in whose name laws are made and judgements are given. Such transformation was conceived by the 19th century liberalism – particularly in France – as the the French Revolution’s ἔσχατον.

Ἐσχατον: what is at the far end, in ancient Greek. Culmination and solution of the tragedy, in Aristotle’s *Poetics* (1449a, 10). Nevertheless, no tragedy ends here. For Tocqueville, for Guizot, for Lorenz von Stein – just to mention some

²⁵ Cf. Achille MBEMBE, “Necropolitics”.

²⁶ Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 13, 404. Cf., generally, Ahlrich MEYER, “Mechanische und organische Metaphorik politischer Philosophie”.

of the authors who dealt with the politicization of the social question at that time – the Revolution doesn't 'end' with the constitutional achievements but is diverted precisely to the questions of property and work. It turns from political into social²⁷. For this reason, to govern means henceforth to develop technologies of intervention on and in the social body. Social assistance and security technologies, hygienic and sanitary technologies, pedagogical and responsibility technologies²⁸. The main of which is maybe the labour discipline, capable of turning the lazy and idle proletarian body into the worker's productive body.

When Marx starts talking about the process of production and the process of valorisation – that is to say the enlivenment of the body of production of commodities – he evokes the sphere of circulation (the contract as the buying and selling of labour-power), since it represents the necessary mediation in order to enter the “secrete laboratory” of production, as we have seen. It clearly comes to light here that the apparent symmetry between the will of the buyer and that of the seller of labour-power is merely illusory: what the capitalist acquires is not the finished ‘labour’, objectified in a product that closes the trajectory of production, but a potency, a “living ferment”, that ceaselessly valorises capital, once it has been integrated in the process²⁹. What the labourer alienates is less his own individual aptitude (his capability, his peculiar talent, the strength of his body) than a generic faculty that can be externalized and organized according to norms of subjection and conditions of allocation, thus turning it into social labour, supervised cooperation “in-corporated” into capital (*dem Kapital einverleibt*)³⁰. In the planned cooperation with others, the labourer dismisses his own individual limits and develops the faculty of his species (*im planmäßigen Zusammenwirken mit andern streift der Arbeiter seine individuellen Schranken ab und entwickelt sein Gattungsvermögen*), Marx writes³¹. However, how is such “in-corporation” accomplished, in terms that do not belong to the sole configuration of abstract labour?

It is well known that in his great book devoted to the development of the English working class Edward P. Thompson has focused on a crucial fact: the working class is not a subject that appears at a given moment in history, it is rather “a fluency”, a relation, whose composition escapes whenever we try to

27 See Sandro CHIGNOLA, *Fragile cristallo*. More in general: Werner CONZE, “Vom ‘Pöbel’ zum ‘Proletariat’”; Eckart PANKOKE, *Die Arbeitsfrage*.

28 See for example François EWALD, *L'État providence*; Giovanna PROCACCI, *Gouverner la misère*.

29 Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 5, 200.

30 Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 11, 352.

31 *Ibid.*, 349.

seize it in order to study its anatomy³². The first moment of this relation, we may say, is the fabrication of the worker's body as a productive body, as regards both the individual and the cooperation. Such transformation – certainly neither pacific nor appeasing – takes place in history as a procedure of subjugation of the individual's habits, rhythms and vital acts in the discipline of labour. Stabilizing the vagabond, training the minor or organizing collective movements are some of the strategic coordinates of a social disciplinary process flowing across a series of institutions (punitive, pedagogical, military) that work on the production of modern subjectivity³³.

When Marx analyses the so called primitive accumulation and deals with the 'naturalisation' of the capitalist code of production, he refers to this complex phenomenology of extra-economic coercion. According to his system, neither is it enough to consider the 'persons' of the buyer and seller of labour-power, on the two poles of simple circulation, nor, from a genetic point of view, the pure act of domination by virtue of which the latter, forcibly expropriated from his own means of subsistence (the commons, the earth, the forms of community solidarity), is obliged to voluntarily sell himself and to get "whipped, branded, tortured into the discipline necessary for the wage system" (*in eine dem System der Lohnarbeit notwendige Disziplin hineingepeitscht, -gebrandmarkt, -gefolgert*). What is necessary is rather the process that articulates – and redoubles – the development of the system of production connected to wage labour. In other words, the system of practices reproducing an "Arbeiterklasse" that "by education, tradition, habit" – Marx writes – looks upon the conditions of the capitalist mode of production "as self-evident laws of Nature" (*selbstverständliche Naturgesetze*)³⁴. The process of incorporation of the labourer's cooperation is achieved as a 'naturalisation' of exploitation and command, that means a subjugation of the social body under the discipline of forced labour. A process that engenders a full contact between disciplinary technologies and the resistance of the working class, as long as it deeply takes root in bare life – muscle, nerve and brain, the nexus of repetition and habit. The fabrication of the useful body is a strongly hindered process.

It is inside this factory of Marx's analytics that Michel Foucault works in the mid-1970s. The recent publication of the Course he held at the Collège de France in the first semester 1973 solves many hermeneutic ambiguities as regards

32 Edward P. THOMPSON, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 9: "the notion of class entails the notion of historical relationship. Like any other relationship, it is a fluency which evades analysis if we attempt to stop it dead at any given moment and anatomise its structure".

33 On the category of social discipline see at least Gerhard OESTREICH, *Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates*.

34 Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 24, 765.

his analytics of power³⁵. The domination of capital over the labourer, on which “the dull compulsion of economic relations” places its seal, in Marx words (*der stumme Zwang der ökonomischen Verhältnisse*³⁶), is achieved over a centuries-old battle that displays the fundamental warlike structure of social relationships. As I mentioned before, the fabrication of the docile – and therefore useful – body, that is the disciplinary strategy’s goal, is neither unidirectional nor pacific. Nevertheless, the worker’s body must be subjugated by discipline in order for the labour-power that belongs to it, as its *dynamis*, to be transformed into productive power³⁷.

As for the last case, it is about the twofold process which constitutes the core of Foucault’s Course dedicated to the ‘Société punitive’, that offers a sharp perspective on the analytics of law and penalty that he was developing in those years. Human nature is not labour, he remarks in the last lesson. It is “plaisirs, discontinuités, fête, repos, besoins, instants, hasards, violence”³⁸ what articulates man’s indisciplined life and the stages of its development as a plea for savage relation, capable of creating relationships and collective dimensions outside of the subjection to the productive regime: basically, it is the ceaseless flow of demands and aptitudes that capital will strive to bring under its control – the smooth chronometric temporality of the productive process – and through which the working class will rather meet the concrete subjective forms of its own composition, thus exploiting them as a chance for resistance and organisation.

What Foucault brings to light here is two things that mark his closest point of approach to Marx and, at the same time, his estrangement from Althusser: the first one is the importance of conflict as a moment of tension in the analytics of power; the second is the process by virtue of which disciplinary technologies – and penalty among them – come to perform a function of insurance as regards the organisation of the productive dispositions to which the worker’s body must be subjugated, even before safeguarding the reproduction of the capitalistic relationship of valorisation (namely, through the repression of proletarian illegality)³⁹.

On the one hand, the punitive system must seize the conditions of its own existence with strategies of requisition and segregation and with techniques of stabilisation of mobility, that violently strike the mobile and elusive body of a ‘populace’ made of vagabonds and truants, thus micro-physically spreading inside it – hence Foucault’s first radical statement: the ‘guerre civile’ as the

35 Cf. Michel FOUCAULT, *La société punitive*.

36 Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 24, 765.

37 On this topic, see the remarkable work by Pierre MACHÉREY, *Il soggetto produttivo*.

38 Michel FOUCAULT, *La société punitive*, 235.

39 See Stéphane LEGRAND, “Le marxisme oublié de Foucault”.

general pattern to which the punitive rationality must be brought back, as long as its purpose is not, as it was for Hobbes and Rousseau, the imposition of peace over structurally conflictual relationships, but rather the ceaseless continuation of a war of conquest⁴⁰; on the other hand, just like in Marx, the definition of a perpetually hindered strategic field where both social relationships and subjectivation processes must be devised, once it is clear that the decisive problem of capitalism's origin coincides with the transformation/constitution of life into labour-power⁴¹.

The target of Foucault's research is the overall process of fabrication of labour-power as a subjective disposition that is objectively adapted to the productive conditions, to say it with Stéphane Legrand's incisive formulation. In other words, given Marx's analysis of the genesis of capital, it is about the operation of actual subjection by virtue of which labour is incorporated into the valorisation process. The fact that such process can be objectified in a system of 'natural laws' of economics – that is not merely an ideological veil but a truth effect of the fetishism of commodities, we may say – depends both on the planning of the body and on the discipline of the soul. The unruly and useless body of the truant is transformed into the useful and docile body of the worker – life's plasticity bridled and drilled by the cycles and actions of production – thanks to the mobilisation of series of knowledges that are heterogeneous with respect to economics but strongly affect its processes. Jurisprudence, ethics, pedagogy, military sciences are profitably summoned up – just to mention some of those which play a decisive role in piercing the muddy multitude in order to separate the dangerous classes from the productive ones, and then again blend them together in the disciplinary project: not only do they dissect, subdue to an efficiency calculus and recompose the anatomo-politics of the body, but also correlate to the soul the endeavour of normalisation (juridical but mostly extra-juridical) which objectifies and reproduces the capitalistic relation.

It is on such Marxist background that Michel Foucault develops his analysis of penal systems and his radical reversal of the platonic tradition: at the threshold of modern age, as a constitutive break that establishes new programmatic functions for knowledge, it is not the body that represents the prison of the soul but the soul becomes the prison of the body⁴². The transformation of multitudes into labour-power is the result of a sort of transcendental schematism of discipline. It redraws and appropriates space as well as it reorganises and records time. The

40 In the course of 1976 at the Collège de France, *Il faut défendre la société*, Michel FOUCAULT will define this perspective "rétournement de la présupposition de Clausewitz".

41 See Pierre DARDOT and Christian LAVAL, *Marx, prénom: Karl*, 202.

42 Cf. Michel FOUCAULT, *Surveiller et punir*, 34.

so called primitive accumulation is on one hand the effect of the fabrication of docile bodies – “the human body gets into a power machinery that inspects, dismembers and recomposes it”, Foucault writes, since it segregates it and ties it to the repetitiveness of an action, to a functional location, to a performance hierarchy – and on the other hand the effect of the constitution of time’s integral usefulness, by ensuring its quality and continuous control⁴³. Within such double constituent process the expression that Marx takes from Fourier comes true: the factory is a mitigated life sentence⁴⁴. For Foucault it is about the twin relationship between prison-form and the wage-form, that is genealogically inferable⁴⁵.

Turning life time into labour time means arranging the body. In other words, installing the operativeness of a power device inside it. ‘Power’, here, does not mean a ‘thing’ that belongs or might belong to somebody, but rather the reversible trajectory where emerges a battle between a resistance and what has succeeded in defeating and dominating it⁴⁶. In Marx the incorporation of labour-power into capital – subjection of life to control and valorisation – is achieved as a rigid extraction of absolute surplus value thanks to the institution of the working day. Indefinitely extending the working time, however, means finding an invincible resistance in the worker’s physical corporeality – in his very anatomical composition. Combining the working day with the technical organisation of production means intensifying productive processes and valorising relative surplus value. But it also means, as well as for Marx, concentrating and enhancing the subjectivity and counter-power of the working class; its potential political composition. The working body, understood both as individual and as collective, is the stake of the constant reorganisation of powers and knowledges that keep confronting it as a mobile, irreducible and literally *dynamic* call.

By the end of the 1960s and the end of the 1970s, the governmental functions of such irreducibility, tied to the wage-form and to the prison-form – understood as the factory’s orderly enclosure and as the discipline of the working day – undergo a definitive crisis, at least in the western experience to which Foucault’s direct experience is connected. One of the reasons that bring his philosophy back to the top is his radical questioning of his own categories in a direction that may define ultra-Marxist rather than post-Marxist⁴⁷.

What is now directly put to work and exploited by the increasingly ‘extractive’ functions of capital is less the human body, along with its disciplined usefulness,

43 Ibid., 139 sq.; 152.

44 Cf. Karl MARX, *Das Kapital*, I, 13, 450.

45 Cf. Michel FOUCAULT, *La société punitive*, 72.

46 Cf. Gilles DELEUZE, “Qu’est-ce qu’un dispositif?”.

47 See Antonio NEGRI, *Marx oltre Marx*.

than the human nature, understood according to the species-specific qualities that are immanent in it as a linguistic and relational animal: emotionality, cooperation skills, potential of sociability⁴⁸. Labour is no longer directly organised, reduced to a unitary command and locked inside the perimeter of the working day, but rather diffused, set ‘free’, made precarious. Its model is that of autonomous enterprising.

What happens then to the body in the general social factory of post-industrial society? There may be something even more invasive than the discipline that had intersected the body through the series of extra-economic devices of the capitalist machinery between the 18th and 19th century. In the planning of the new-liberal society of individuals, it is the sort of discipline that goes along with the rhetoric about human capital and about the individual as a self-entrepreneur subject⁴⁹. Here the body – performing, hyper-connected, cyborg – is not at all captured by a directive and governmental function in sight of dictated accumulation, but by the subject himself, who finds and recognizes in it the substratum of his own valorisation as an individual enterprise.

And this is not all. The body – marked, inspected by the border guards’ infra-reds, digitalized and scanned in every airport – is governed, filtered, slowed down, but not tied in its mobility, which becomes itself a function of capital valorisation. What gets moving is more and more ‘Leiber’, and less and less ‘Körpern’, we might say.

In the history of the working class, the resistance of individual and collective bodies has achieved extraordinary subjectivation processes. Counter-conducts, as Foucault calls them. Today – right on the level of mobile, flexible, precarious, global and half-cast corporeality, confronted to governmental devices of control and valorisation – it is once again a matter of conceiving tactics of resistance and escape.

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⁴⁸ Cf. Sandro MEZZADRA and Brett NEILSON, “Extraction, Logistics, Finance”.

⁴⁹ Cf. Pierre DARDOT and Christian LAVAL, *La nouvelle raison du monde*.

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