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BODIES IN EXILE: JULIA KRISTEVA AND TZVETAN TODOROV'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE BODY

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Abstract. Both going from Bulgaria to Paris to do their doctorates in philosophy, Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov contributed to the development of the philosophy of the body in France. In the period 1965 – 1975 they were able to bring their Bulgarian culture to both structural analysis and narrative. The singularity of their contributions is to make between intertextuality and intercorporeality a dialogue that is both theoretical between linguistics, semiotics and psychoanalysis but also practical with the questions of barbarism, horror and the colonization of bodies.

Refusing to submit to the totalitarianism of power and fascist languages, from the Nazis to the regime of authoritarian communism, Todorov and Kristeva place the subject's desire at the center of his corporality.

They are thus part of the debate where the philosophy of the body becomes a central question in France through the work of Claude Bruaire, Michel Serres, Michel Onfray and Michel Foucault but also initially under the impetus of the feminist criticism of Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig.

Keywords: French philosophy; Philosophy of the body; Julia Kristeva; Tzvetan Todorov

The body has become (Chirpaz 1963; Bernard 1972; Richir 1983; Nancy 1992; *Le corps* 1992; Goddard & Labrune 1992; Dagognet 1992; Baudart & Revault 1992; Andrieu 1993; Andrieu 2000; Lévine & Touboul 2002; Jaquet 2001; Cognard 2003; Andrieu 2006a) an object of philosophy to found knowledge on the analysis of perception, sensation and emotion. The living and the lived experience of the body are no longer separated and philosophers are read through the unity of body and mind (Jaquet 2004).

Often reduced to the idiosyncrasy of the philosopher and his body (Huisman & Ribes 1992; Le Diraison & Zernik 1993), the philosophy of the body becomes a central question in France through the work of Claude Bruaire, Michel Serres, Michel Onfray and Michel Foucault (Foucault 1984; Serres 1985; Onfray 1989),

but also initially under the impetus of the feminist criticism of Simone de Beauvoir, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Monique Wittig (De Beauvoir 1949; Cixous 1969; Irigaray 1974; Wittig 1975). The philosophy of the body was first linked to practices of self-liberation, knowledge through limits and the search for extremes. Questioning health through the balance of body and mind, the philosophy of the body defines standards and norms of reflexivity and of the practices.

The political philosophy of the body (Sawicki 1991; McWorther 1999; Kauppi 2000), initiated by M. Foucault, P. Bourdieu and L. Marcuse, finds today in the philosophy of gender a deconstruction of norms and habitus. The philosophies of ethics and morality also seize the body to defend a conception of the free and consenting subject within the rights of man and woman (Marzano 2007; Marzano 2006; Marzano 2002). These moral and bioethical conceptions, which condemn pornography, sadomasochism, the virtual by criticizing the liberation of the body, still maintain a dualism of the mind and the body in the name of an embodied subject.

Rather than this traditional *body-mind* problem (Feigl 2002; Bunge 1980; Johnson 1987; Kim 2006; *Le corps et l'esprit...* 2004; Andrieu 2006b) and this opposition between the soul and the body (Tymieniecka 1983; Baertschi 1992; Quillot 2003; Nannini 2002), the body is now an analyzer that reinterprets the history of philosophy (Spicker 1970; Sichère 1982; Melchiorre 1984; Joubaud 1991; Duprose 2002; Svare 2006). The philosophy of the body (Guerra 1956; Bruaire 1968; Galimberti 1998; Andrieu 2002) allows a rereading of phenomenology, psychology and anthropology.

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However, Tzvetan Todorov and Julia Kristeva's respective arrivals in France are part of an invention of the philosophy of the body in France between language and desire, between structuralism and psychoanalysis (Andrieu 1993). We will set out here that three themes common to both thinkers contribute for this: embodied language (*la langue incarnée*), intercorporeality (*l'intercorporéité*) and the damaged body (*le corps abimé*).

Embodied Language

By studying the texts of the Russian formalists, Todorov investigated the link between symbolism and interpretation, opening the texts to the question of otherness in the language itself. The originality of poetics is to study: it is not the simple semiology too sociological of Roland Barthes', but to find together with Benveniste, Jakobson and Genette "the properly verbal aspect... by a series of verbal, phonic, rhythmic properties... this subtle architectonic" (Todorov 2002, p. 93).

In Issue 1 of the literary journal *Poétique* which he created with Hélène Cixous and Gérard Genette in 1968, the reference of the title is presented as coming from the tradition of Aristotle to Valéry: "Literality exceeds the limits of 'official' literature as much as the poetic function – the field of constituted poetry ". In his text on

“narrative transformations” in *Poétique*, Issue 3 of 1970, Todorov finds in Propp “the variety of predicates like that of statism – dynamism” (Todorov 1970a, p. 323). The semantic transformation, not syntactic, aims to show the movement in the language itself: the mode of action, the intention to accomplish an action, the result which consists in succeeding in, achieving, obtaining, the way in which the action takes place like “to hasten to, to dare, to excel in, to strive for” (Todorov 1970a, p. 328), the inchoative, progressive, terminative aspect like to begin, to be in the process of, to finish. The acts not yet occurred are as many suppositions like to foresee, to present, to suspect. More than the body, what is at stake is the transformation of subjectivation with “actions denoted by the verbs believe, think, have the impression, consider...” (Todorov 1970a, p. 330). Between difference and resemblance, the narrative must account for this tension as “a two-way operation” (Todorov 1970a, 333).

From 1966 – 1967, in the sense of this work in linguistics developed by Todorov, as Julia Kristeva published under the name Julia Joyaux in *Le Langage, cet inconnu. Une initiation à la linguistique* (Language: The Unknown. An Initiation into Linguistics – Joyaux 1969, republished Kristeva 1981), at the seminar of Roland Barthes she has “presented the work of Bakhtin during the seminar... and the concepts of dialogism, text and intertextuality” (Buffat 1971, p. 112). In 1966, in *Categories of Literary Narrative*, Todorov wants to separate himself from psychology and history to emphasize meaning and interpretation. Here too, it is the logic of actions that concern the threads of the plot to highlight “personal transformations” (Todorov 1966, p. 141). It is indeed “the offense in discourse” that must be sought in the unraveling of bodies in dangerous liaisons (Todorov 1966, p. 155). In the *Introduction to fantastic literature*, 1970, the passage from mind to matter makes ideas “immediately perceptible” (Todorov 1970b, p. 120). Because of the polysemy of the image, it is a question of placing side by side “abstract terms – sexuality, death” with covert themes – the devil and the vampire” (Todorov 1970b, p. 151). With Kafka’s metamorphosis, the “supernatural becomes natural” (Todorov 1970b, p. 180).

Intertextuality and Intercorporeality

At the colloquium on Bataille, organized by Philippe Sollers in 1972, Kristeva gave a lecture on “Bataille, Experience and Practice”. She emphasized the process of negativity engaged in Bataille’s work through “this race towards dislocation” (Kristeva 1973, p. 268), which thus passes through “either a piece of the body or a piece of language. The fetishization of the fragmented body or of verbal components or even of the “text” is thus the united reverse of a negativism that attacks the unity of the subject”.

But Bataille’s interpretation, which links desire and heterogeneity in eroticism, is a way of affirming the stasis of the I, the subject itself: “Desire and the heterogeneity to which it leads are not something below knowledge and its singular (*unaire*)

subject, but rather their crossing; carnal organicity, erotic orgy, obscenity exist only as contradictions, as struggles, of the violent materiality external to the subject, with the affirmed instance of this subject itself" (Kristeva 1973, p. 278).

Instead the experience of language, Kristeva specifies how in Bataille the experience is directly that of "eroticism, enjoyment, sacrifice, expenditure" (Kristeva 1973, p. 281). Thus Bataille's analysis of Oedipus tears apart the linguistic structure in order to "represent the 'free energies', circulating through the body of the subject himself or towards the fragmented bodies of social partners (parents or others)" (Kristeva 1973, p. 284). Kristeva already perceives the body of the mother and the body of the woman as the recurring theme: "he meditates on 'limit states' of expenditure, of eroticism at a loss, of sacrifice; states that pass through the mother and the desire for her but, far from settling there and even less from sublimating her, crossing her and sullyng her, that is to say, discover the body of the woman which – finally – is not that of the reassuring and identifying parent" (Kristeva 1973, p. 285).

The Damaged Body

The damaged body, so present also in Todorov's *Conquest of America* (Todorov 1982), is a theme to emerge among women (Kristeva 1987), but also in colonial and totalitarian genocides including in Bulgaria, like "Bulgarian fascists who occupied the place of State Security" (Todorov 1991a, p. 312) to the point of leaving Bulgaria (Todorov 2002, p. 53). In Todorov's *Facing the Extreme*, the dehumanization of the victims is based on their nudity, deprived of clothes to consider them as "non-persons" (Todorov 1991a, p. 192). Enjoying power over the other is at the center of the rereading of totalitarianism from the point of view of a "libido dominandi" (Todorov 1991a, p. 212), invaded by three shames, of memory, of surviving, of being human (Todorov 1991a, p. 279). In his article *Bulgaria in France*, Todorov questions the representation of Bulgarians as barbarians because "perhaps of the ambivalence of the geographical place occupied by Bulgaria" (Todorov 1991b, p. 32) between East and West. The Bulgarian word gave "bougre which means heretic (manichean) or sexual invert" (Todorov 1991b, p. 37). How to face others if even in the ways of love the garden is imperfect because to "love joy is opposed term by the term to love desire" (Todorov 1998, p. 182).

With the *Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, Todorov takes a step by "telling an exemplary story" (Todorov 1982, p. 12), that of the colonization and massacre of the American Indians. Barbarism is understood here according to the logic of the analysis of stories, beyond the massacres, from a foreign religious anthropology: "everyone is the barbarian of the other, it is enough to become one to speak a language that the other ignores" (Todorov 1982, p. 196). The passage from the civilization of sacrifice to that of massacre makes the symbolic world disappear: "one has the impression that the act finds its justification in itself: one handles sabers for the pleasure of handling sabers, one cuts off the nose, the tongue and the

sex of the Indian without the slightest rite presenting itself to the mind of the nose cutter” (Todorov 1982, p. 150).

In the 1974 conference led by Armando Verdiglione, *Psychanalyse et sémiotique (Psychoanalysis and Semiotics)*, Kristeva presented, undoubtedly in the light of her book *Des chinoises* published the same year by Editions des femmes, a paper on “Discourse and Family in China: Some Proposals”. In 1975 Guy Scarpetta, in *Le quotidien de Paris*, would explain well the link with the history of authorized and repressed enjoyment in China: “A systematic study of archaic kinship systems, and their traces. Confucian morality and society (repression of the woman, devalued, considered as a ‘little man’ – but also a distinction between enjoyment and the social, between private and public, granting women a certain power only over their restricted ‘territory’). A history of the feminist movement, of its difficult junction with the revolutionary movement. Exploration of the role of women in Chinese socialist society (marriage and family laws, massive entry of women onto the political and economic scene, their role in revolutionary phases, critical campaigns, etc.).”

Precisely at the heart of its interdisciplinarity between psychoanalysis and semiotics, in 1975, in the volume *Matière et pulsion de mort (Matter and Death Drive)* of the psychoanalysis journal edited by Armando Verdiglione, in Kristeva’s contribution “La traversée des signes” (“The Crossing of Signs”), the question of the unnameable is at the center of the intertextuality between semiology and psychoanalysis. She uses the psychoanalyst to reveal the “unsaid: the unnameable rhythm, music of the semiotizing body”. Against the logic of reproduction, it is appropriate to analyze what “articulates pleasure and enjoyment” (Kristeva 1975, p. 287). Kristeva continues her work here.

The damaged body has been understood as a monstrosity of nature (Betterton 2006, p. 81) because it is always connected to the fear of the biological anomaly produced by the maternal body through the uncertainty of the child. If Kristeva was able to link the maternal body and abjection in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur (The Powers of Horror)*, the naturalization of the monster (Céard 1977; Fischer 1991; Paré 1971; Wolff 1948) is the subject of a science, teratology, from 1830 and Isidore Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. Teratology is characterized in its beginnings by a well-arranged and rational classification of monstrosities based on their anatomical organization. In addition, laws of general and specific anatomical organization of monstrosities were put forward to account for the formation and organization of monsters. The descriptive and nominative “science of Monsters” of Étienne Wolff’s was complemented by the experimentation initiated by Camille Dareste in the 1850s under the phrase “experimental teratogeny”.

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Conclusion

Michel Feher published three volumes *Fragments for a History of Human Body* in 1989, which contain translated contributions of French research by Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marie-José Baudinet, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Claude Beaune, Nicole Loraux, Eric Alliez, Jean Claude Schmitt, Georges Vigarello, Jacques le Goff, Françoise Héritier-Augé, Aline Rousselle, Florence Dupont and Louis Marin. Julia Kristeva is presented by Tzvetan Todorov.

Everything shows, however, that the Bulgarian contribution of the two authors was part of a new conception of the body in the heart of the 1960s – 1980s.

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Appendix

Since Claude Bruaire named *Philosophie du corps* (*Philosophy of the body*) as a discipline in 1968; rediscovering Husserl, Nietzsche (Blondel 1986; Wotling 1995; Haaz 2002), Merleau-Ponty (Barbaras 1991; Barbaras 1998; Saint Aubert 2006), he opened the theoretical possibility of theses of philosophy of the body that renewed the approaches, the methods and the objects.

So the body has become an object of the field of philosophy, at least since Claude Bruaire had posed in phenomenology the importance of a knowledge of the living body in relation to the lived body. It was also at the very moment when Paul Ricoeur had the first thesis on the body in France defended in philosophy at the University of Paris X (Kervégan 2007; Roux 2017), a report of more than 40 pages of which would greet the publication in *La revue philosophique de Louvain* under the pen of Michel Renaud (Renaud 1969). No chair, although the body is an object where phenomenology, cognitive sciences, and analytical philosophy have been able to benefit from the creation of positions, still exists in 2025 in philosophy of the body in France while there have been defended more than 218 theses in the field since 1968 as of 2024!

Among this long list, the following topics, along with their authors and supervisors, could be pointed out:

Université Paris Sorbonne, 2005, Michela Marzano, *Corps, sexualité et médecine: Philosophie morale et enjeux politiques*, dir. C. Larrère.

Université Paris Sorbonne, 2005, Andrea L. Carbone, *La représentations de l'organisation spatiale du corps chez Aristote*, dir. A. Jaulin.

Université Paris Sorbonne, 2005, Dominique Weber, *Le corps de Dieu, le désir des fous et l'histoire du salut: recherche sur la situation métaphysique et théologique de la philosophie première et la science de l'Etat de Th. Hobbes*, dir. P. F. Moreau.

Université de technologie de Compiègne – UTC, 2005, Armen Khatchatourov, *La technique, le corps et l'espace: une lecture de Husserl, Heidegger et Merleau Ponty*, dir. J. M. Salanskis.

Université of Amiens, 2004, Eugénie Bemvo Mendome (1971 –), *L'idée de corps dans la philosophie de Nietzsche*, dir. Jeffrey A. Barash.

Université Paris 4, 2004, Thomas Chabin (1973 –), *Le problème de l'âme et du corps*, dir. Alain Boyer.

Université Rennes 1, 2004, Delphine Kolesnik-Antoine, *L'homme cartésien. La "force qu'a l'âme de mouvoir le corps"*, dir. Jacqueline Lagrée.

Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2002, Frédérique Boitel (1969 –), *Le corps dans les champs contemporains de la picturalité et de la scupturalité*, dir. Monique Dixsaut.

Université Paris 12, 2002, Ingrid Laurent-Auriol (1957 –), *Corps et existence: une phénoménologie du corps dans la perspective du Dasein*, dir. Françoise Dastur.

Université Lyon 3, 2002, Jérôme Dargent (1959 –), *Entre culture et technoscience, à propos du corps obèse*, dir. Jean-Claude Beaune.

Université Paris 1, 2001, Gilles Marmasse (1971 –), *De la nature à l'esprit: corps animal et corps humain chez Hegel*, dir. Jean-François Kervégan.

Université Paris 12, 2000, Luc Richir, *L'invention du corps*, dir. Eliane Escoubas.

Université Paris 12, 2000, Michel Eltchaninoff, *L'expression du corps chez Dostoevski*, dir. Françoise Dastur.

Université Paris 10, 2000, Sarah Carvallo-Plus, *Nouveaux essais sur le corps humain: Leibniz et la réforme médicale*, dir. Denis Kambouchner.

Université Paris 4, 1999, André Charrak, *Raison et perception: le problème de la résonance du corps sonore aux 18^{ème} siècle et ses implications philosophiques*.

Université Paris 1, 1999, Anne Marie Sellami Vinas, *L'écriture du corps en scène, une poétique du mouvement*, dir. Costin Miereanu.

École des hautes études en sciences sociales – EHESS, 1998, Alice Pechriggl, *Corps transfigurés; stratifications de l'imaginaire des sexes/genres*, dir. Cornelius Castoriadis.

Université Paris 1, 1998, Pascal Haegel, *Corps et personne: essai de philosophie de la matière*, dir. François Dagognet.

Université Paris 10, 1998, Sungmin Hong, *Habitus, corps, domination sur certains présupposés philosophiques de la sociologie de Pierre Bourdieu*, dir. Jacques Bidet.

Université Paris 10, 1997, Marc Kirsch, *L'âme et le corps: dualisme, monisme, matérialisme*, dir. Anne Fagot Largeault.

Université Lyon 3, 1997, Cyrille Harpet, *Trilogie du déchet: corps, ville, industrie*, dir. Jean Claude Beaune.

Université de Nice, 1997, Barbara Elia, *Nietzsche: le corps, la danse et le langage*, dir. Daniel Charles.

Université de Lyon 3, 1997, Christian Salomon, *Cartographie du corps et expérience du temps*, dir. Jean Claude Beaune.

Université Paris 10, 1996, Isabelle Dupéron, *Le parallélisme psychophysiologique: entre le corps et l'esprit*, dir. Daniel Andler.

Université Paris 1, 1995, Paule Adamy, *Les corps de J.-J. Rousseau*, dir. Jean Deprun.

Université Nice, 1995, Sylvie Timbert, *Soun-Gui Kim ou les devenirs corps composite de l'unique trait de pinceau*, dir. Daniel Charles.

Université de Bordeaux 3, 1995, Amette Razafindehibe, *Corps et raison chez Nietzsche*, dir. Michel Adam.

Université Rennes 2, 1994, Philippe Dubrul, *Corps et âme. La dialectique de la personne comme fondement de l'eschatologie dans la théorie de la médiation*, dir. Jean Gagnepain.

Université Toulouse 2, 1993, Jean-Pierre Cambier, *Code noir; code de Nuremberg, code génétique: de l'esclavage à la nationalisation des corps. Essai de décodage du biopouvoir*, dir. Louis Sala Molins.

Université Paris 1, 1993, Philippe Zinetti, *La blessure, la représentation du corps sur le corps*, dir. Jean Landri.

Université Paris 8, 1993, Michel La Chance (1952 –), *Jouir du néant, le corps, les figures du pouvoir; le langage dans les écrits scientifiques et politiques de J.P. Marat 1779 – 1793*, dir. René Schérer.

Université Paris 1, 1993, Frédéric Guerrin, *Esthétique et usure. Essai sur le corps et les corps*, dir. Jean Lancri.

Université Paris 1, 1992, Hiroyuki Akama, *Tableau, corps, texte. Etudes historiques sur la classification-récit en France au XIX^e siècle*, dir. François Dagognet.

Université Paris 10, 1992, Marc Perelman, *Du corps à l'architecture: genèse et structure de l'ordre visuel moderne*, dir. Georges Labica.

Université Rouen, 1991, Philippe Fontaine, *Chair et corps dans la philosophie de Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, dir. Jean Granier.

Université Paris 1, 1991, Emmanuel Rouvillois, *Leiturgia. Pour une philosophie du corps*, dir. François Dagognet.

Université Aix Marseille 1, 1989, André Simha, *Le texte du corps, questionnement, interprétation et langage biologique dans la généalogie nietzschéenne*, dir. Paul Moni Vernes.

Université de Nice, 1989, Fumiyasu Katayama, *Le corps et le monde*, dir. Bernard Janin.

Université Paris 1, 1988, Yoshitaka Watanabe, *La problématique du corps et du langage chez Merleau-Ponty: traduction, altérité, transgression*.

Université Montpellier 3, 1988, Robert Bontpart, *Etude d'aspects d'une philosophie du corps chez Descartes, ses conséquences épistémologiques et métaphysiques*, dir. Huguette Courtes.

Université Besançon, 1989, Daniel Limat (1939 –), *Le corps chez Alain*, dir. André Vergez.

Université Paris 4, 1987, Cheng Pei (1959 –), *Le problème du corps propre et de la chair dans la philosophie Merleau-Ponty*, dir. Henri Birault.

Université Paris 10, 1987, Enzo Neppi (1955 –), *L'écriture autobiographique: Sartre, le corps et le discours maternel*, dir. Pierre Kaufmann.

Université Paris 1, 1984, Françoise Bosser, *L'espace du corps. Travail sur une fantasmatique du corps de la mère*, dir. Bernard Teyssède.

Université Paris 10, 1982, Margaret Balley Roupenne, *Femmes en pays musulman: Corps, lieux, paroles*, dir. Gilbert Lascault.

Université Paris 10, 1982, Eric Blondel, *La pensée du corps: Nietzsche, la philosophie comme généalogie philologique de la culture*, dir. Paul Ricoeur.

Université Paris 10, 1979, Jean Manuel Vuillaume, *Les formes du corps et se "libérations" dans les arts plastique depuis 1950*, dir. Pierre Kaufman.

Université Paris 8, 1979, Monique Blanc, *Métamorphose des corps sonores*, dir. Daniel Charles.

Université Nancy 2, 1976, Michel Bloch, *La relation au corps dans la communication*, dir. Georges Vallin.

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