PART I  Contemporary Perspectives in Anthropology, Philosophy, and Psychology on the Human Body: An Introductory Overview
I  The Conception of the Human Body: An Evolutionary Study from Ancient Times to the Hypermodern Era

1.1  THE HYPERMODERN CONCEPT OF THE BODY: ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

One should accept one's body as one's home, a living space designated for communication and relationships. We live in a highly complex time deeply marked by the digital revolution, an infosphere that has produced radical transformations (Louw, 2017), increasingly conspicuous acquisitions of cognitive neuroscience, and all related anthropological fallouts.¹

Our time witnesses the hybridization of humans and machines, confronting us with the onerous problem of new forms and the effective consistency of post-human freedom. The body is now in danger of changing structurally into a thing:² the merging of the human body with machines entails certain potentially burdensome problems pertaining to the concept of a “post-human” freedom wherein the body is probably transforming anatomically into something new.³

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¹ The infosphere is an environment populated by informational entities. For further details, see Perucchietti (2019), Floridi (2017), Carbone (2016), Prensky (2013), Carr (2011), and Grion (2012).

² For a critical review of cognitive neuroscience, see Ehrenberg (2019).

³ “Having exhausted the great historical task of confronting God and the animal, which has lasted in the West since the time of the ancient Greeks, it is now the thing that demands all our attention and raises the most pressing question: it has become both the center of upheaval and the promise of happiness” (Perniola, 1994, p. 18). Again, “If we look for something in common experiences that presents analogies with the neutral feeling of [alienation from oneself], we find it in drug addictions and in particular those caused by opium and its derivatives ... The general tone of the junkie seems to be characterized by feeling his body as a thing, by becoming a foreign body as much as a garment, by escaping the cycle of tension, discharge and rest” (Perniola, 1994, p. 18).

All translations from foreign language texts are the authors’ own unless otherwise stated. For an effective critical summary of these topics, see Scardovi (2017).
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How has the topic of the body been treated in previous ages? Evidently, the perspective of human physicality has changed over time.

In many philosophies of life and religious circles, as influenced by Platonic dualism (the body is merely an inferior prison of the human soul), there is immediately the association that the human body, with its sensual needs, is from a lower order and should be suppressed in a Stoic way . . .

Scepticism regarding the value of the sensual human body with its passions and sexual needs can be traced back to what one can call the Platonic dualism in anthropology. For example, Plato provides us with the idea that a soul can be deprived of its body, that it does not come fully into its own until it has been separated from the body, and that it is immortal. The body is therefore merely clothing for the soul, a kind of prison from which it should escape and be liberated.

In general, the human body was in many religious circles and philosophies of life excluded from “soulfulness” and reduced to the realm of “flesh.”

(Louw, 2017, p. 42)

The body represents a significant theme that has induced innumerable reflections since the beginning of human civilization. The relationship between body and mind has conceptually affected human beings since ancient times. Alternative positions have been taken over the centuries, either supporting a separation between the soma (Greek, “body”) and the psyche (Greek psychē meaning “breath, principle of life, life, soul”) or endorsing the existence of psychosomatic unity. As may be anticipated, Plato was the first supporter of the dualist theory (i.e., the separation between mind and body). He introduced the distinction between the soul and the body as substances that are independent of each other and that are irreducible. The soul was considered immortal and conceived as the seat of higher consciousness and mental functions that continued to exist after the death of
the body. Conversely, the body without life (i.e., after death) was
cognized as becoming an object. The Platonic vision was resumed
and accentuated by Descartes almost 2,000 years later. He deemed
the mind and the body to be completely separate entities, considering
the mind to represent the phenomenon within which all human
knowledge was vested. Descartes theorized that the mind could not
be positioned at the same level as material reality; therefore, the body
was a machine governed by the mind.

The holistic vision opposes the dualist view, postulating a unity
between mind and body. The origins of this conception can be traced
with certainty to the earliest historically documented periods of
human civilization. The first definitive studies on the psychosomatic
unity of the human body and mind are dated to the time of the
Hippocratic school. Aristotle also recognized this psychosomatic
unity, claiming that the soul shaped the body; thus, the soul could
not be separated from its material form (see Frati, 2012).

Common psychological phenomena, such as a slight feeling of
joy or fear, affect the body; on the other hand, particularly stressful
emotional tensions occurring in succession can cause organ diseases
such as gastric ulcers. The psychosomatic approach is, therefore, an
ttempt to see people in their entirety. It is based on the key concept
that a person represents an inseparable biological unity comprising
both body and mind. An individual is constructed not only of
a biological body but also of psychic and emotional factors that dis-
charge decisive roles in a person’s balance and in the genesis and
development of diseases. Recently, the body has been regarded as
the primary vessel through which we can open up to the world
(Galimberti, 1983; Frati, 2012), and this notion is widely exemplified
in the philosophical ideas of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche and
Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The body’s significance was subsequently

4 For an overview of the body in Western thought, see Galimberti’s (1983) dated but still
useful essay, Il corpo, and Frati (2012).
5 See Nietzsche (1964, p. 34): “Wherever the doctrine of pure spirituality was dominant,
it destroyed nervous energy with its aberrations: it taught to hold the body in contempt,
to neglect or torment it, and to torment and despise man himself, because of all his
emphasized by biopolitics (an intersectional discipline straddling human biology and politics) and biopower (the research domain related to the practices of modern nation-states and the regulation of their subjects through an explosion of numerous techniques aimed at the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations).\textsuperscript{6} Gilles Deleuze’s exposition of the mechanisms of “modern societies of control” underlined the body’s significance.\textsuperscript{7} Such concepts have highlighted the importance of the body and illuminated how some dogmas presume the soma.

The central role taken on by the body is still evident, as can be observed on several fronts:

- Although cognitive neurosciences have made extraordinary discoveries, they pose the risk of conceiving of and perceiving human beings only as neuronal entities and not as social beings. On the contrary, Alain Ehrenberg iterates that we must always remember the importance of social aspects and the whole body, not just the neuronal element.

According to Ehrenberg (2019), it is therefore impossible to describe the role occupied by cognitive neurosciences, the meanings they have for us,
the uses we make of them, but also the concrete effects that the therapeutic methods that refer to them have on the individual, without also examining the different ways in which all these aspects are mixed with the rest of existence. Where the psychologist, the neuroscientist, or the sociologist try to reduce the human being to behaviors, he discovers that everything in him is intertwined.

- The hypermodern techniques of “human enhancement” are associated with an important ethical debate\(^8\) that also allows reflection on the true signification of the term and its artificial implications.\(^9\) From this perspective, the classic themes of human identity and human existence are now widely questioned in light of contemporary transformations (also on the human body) induced by technology, biology, and medicine. These themes lead to urgent contemplations:

  Reflecting on identity means, in fact, on the one hand, asking about oneself, opening up the question about the ego that remains the irreplaceable expression of one’s lived individuality, as such irreducible to any other experience; on the other hand, it implies the awareness that this “self” is the original place where the very meaning of the human being, of that human condition, brings us back to the question about our nature, that is, about what was given to us in our coming into the world.

  (Pessina, 2015, p. 450)

- Current theories also posit the pragmatics of the body (as conceived by Deleuze), according to which the body is envisaged as a privileged setting for the employment of techniques and products aimed at unceasingly improving it and fully adhering to social recognition and other people’s expectations.\(^10\) This perspective illuminates the contemporary logic and

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\(^8\) Savulescu and Bostrom (2008, p. 1) maintain that “In the past decade, human empowerment has become the major theme of the debate in applied ethics.” Robotics and nanotechnologies are increasingly pushing the envelope. On the one hand, they are generating enthusiasm: the futurist Ray Kurzweil predicts that by 2045, “human intelligence will be improved a billion-fold thanks to high-tech brain extensions” (Wolfe, 2014); on the other hand, they cause serious concerns (see Longo, 2003).

\(^9\) This point is aptly elucidated by Palazzani (2015).

\(^10\) As mentioned previously, “the question of so-called human enhancement is articulated at two levels: first, a theoretical one, which sets up a debate that calls into question not only whether normativity exists in human nature but also whether it
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dialectic of seduction. In fact, this viewpoint pertains to all aspects of human life, from romantic relationships to the political world and from the cultural domain to the manufacturing of goods. It emerges from the processes of a new capitalism, not the consumerist vision of the past but a particularly seductive notion: Lipovetsky (2019) wrote that the seduction principle imposes itself as an omnipresent and trans-sectorial logic, since it is able to reorganize the power of the dominant spheres of social life and to reorganize ways of living from top to bottom, as well as the ways of coexistence of individuals. Liberal hypermodernity is inseparable from the generalization and supremacy of both the ethos and the mechanisms of seduction.

The current “society of seduction” exercises absolute control over the contemporary concept of the body and encourages a dizzying aesthetic market, particularly for women. It elevates technological beauty to a sort of desirable metaphysical utopic status (without limits, without imperfections, without vices, and even without death) (see Lipovetsky, 2019).

For example, in contemporary society, the female body tends to become an object of lust and seduction. In the social media, the female body was highjacked by business, companies, the even makes sense to use this category, on the basis of evolutionary premises with the characteristics of true meta-physics. The other level, pragmatic in nature, which is in some ways winning, consists in enlarging the market of products that western citizens can resort to, in the hope of improving their own abilities to live up to social expectations and to their personal desires for self-fulfillment” (Pessina, 2015, p. 451).

We may recall Jean Baudrillard’s (2002) definition: universe of seduction means what stands in radical opposition to the universe of production. It is not a matter of creating things, of producing them for a world of value, but a matter of seducing, meaning that we are diverting them from their value, their identity, their reality, to transform them according to the game of appearances (and seduction) – this is a symbolic exchange. A synthetic and incisive interpretation of Baudrillard’s seduction may offer an interpretive key to post-humanism. (For further details, see Amendola, Del Gaudio, and Tirino, 2017, Lipovetsky, 2019, p. 14.) In this context, we are now more than ever witnessing a massive aesthetic visualization, with a marked female presence in symbolic codes and in imaginative social plots, in the name of extreme seduction: paradoxically, we see simultaneously the strong presence, the positivity and meaningful power of women, but also the great poverty of the social imaginary in which the production of fetish femininity is intensified, and where women are the objects of manipulation, remodeling, and restructuring. (For further details, see Brasingt, 2017.)
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advertisement enterprise and the social media to sell products. The commodification of the female body contributes to the fact that femininity is constantly being robbed of soulful beauty and portrayed as an idol of glamour, fame and flirting sensuality.

(Louw, 2017, p. 53)

The aforementioned perspective evokes the following questions: how does present-day society perceive the human body? Which problems characterize current anthropological scenarios? We can also ask the following:

If one transfers the notion of beauty to human life, very specifically the naked human body, what would be the implication for theory formation in anthropology and the human quest for meaning and significance? Thus, the aesthetic question: For what purpose is the human body designed?

(Louw, 2017, p. 42)

1.2 MIGUEL BENASAYAG’S CONCEPTS OF FUNCTIONING AND EXISTENCE

The adjectives “modern,” “postmodern,” and “hypermodern” are labels that justify the innate human tendency to classify historical eras in addition to actual cultural epochal interruptions.12

According to Miguel Benasayag (2019), we use the term “hypermodern” to designate only the most advanced phase of the present-day crisis of reason. He believes that the current time represents a very irrational phase. The process of the crisis of reason began in the modern age with the decline of the Cartesian

12 For an overview, see Franzini [2018]. With respect to the undue simplification of the modern as a triumph of strong, founding, totalizing reason, and of the postmodern as praise for weak reason, of fragmentation, of multiplicity, Franzini shows the merit of highlighting the “liquid” traits of modernity, its moments of crisis, and its ideological plurality, which, in this sense, is common to the “postmodern.” Some people prefer the term “neo-modernity.” For further details, see Mordacci [2017].
philosophical concepts of clarity and distinction that typified rationalism and the recovery of ancient traditions in tandem with the myth of Vico (which does not obey merely objective Cartesian logic). Later, the Age of Enlightenment focused on reason but also recovered the aesthetic dimension through its progressive evolution of the Cartesian paradigm based on works by personalities such as Diderot, D’Alambert, and Bayle. The next historical period may be characterized by the dialectical consciousness of Hegel and continued into posterity through the concept of crisis theorized by Baudelaire, Benjamin, and Simmel. In our opinion, the crisis of reason typical of the contemporary hypermodern era can be explained through the set of theoretical concepts proposed by Benasayag: to function and to exist. Benasayag stated that there is currently no ontological fracture between these two dimensions; rather, there is some sort of hybridization:

I want to make it clear right now that there is no “ontological” separation between these two dimensions: I do not mean to say that the functioning would be on the side of immediacy, of adaptive response and physical-chemical mechanisms, while existence would fall into the category of the superior principle, of some “vital force,” or of a mystery of life.

(Benasayag, 2019, p. 10)

In sum, human beings are now often metaphorically compared with machines that have to be efficient. Human existence is deemed similar to a functioning mechanism. Thus, there is a hybridization of the concepts of functioning and existing. However, human beings cannot be considered machines, and the contemporary crisis of reason emerges now.

As previously stated, Benasayag noted that there is now a sort of hybridization, interpenetration, and overall unity between the concepts of functioning and existing (p. 19). Such intersections entail the metaphorical decline of human existence, often reduced to predictive