



BODY AS METAPHOR

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1. Looking Back, Looking Forward

"The time has come

For closing books"

"To Sir With Love", Don Black and Mark London

By understanding that the opposition "living or dead" is no longer a paradigm in the way we think of people, as we are part of the flow of life that starts long before one's own birth and continues way after one's death, it's of the living Dietmar Kamper that is kept in our cherished memory we come to write here, as the sprouting of his seedlings can still bring freshness and color to everyone. The quality of his intense work still produces resonance.

When Dietmar Kamper announced on his first lecture in São Paulo what he thought were clear signs of the loss of the body as the first signs of man's own extinction, this was not said in a loud apocalyptical way, but rather in a delicate mourning. Kamper mentioned that in Europe people had already lost their bodies and this was probably a sign of man's future extinction. He stated that everyone lived as if a condom involved the whole body, 'protecting'/walling one another. He said it positively surprised him the fact that we still were so corporeal in Brazil and that brought him some kind of hope. This could be the very last chance for mankind. This was May 29th, 1992. The lecture was ***"The Scenery as a Meaning to Senses"***.

About the last part of his prediction, I'm afraid time has proved Professor Dietmar Kamper wrong. The body has become a metaphor down below the Equator, too. Almost 20 years after his first lecture in Brazil, we are getting more and more European and less





and less native Tupi or African – which were the marks Kamper probably thought as flashes of hope about the body. But the inheritance from the ‘civilization’ seems way too strong in this semiotic arena.

As Susan Sontag had already pointed out in her striking 1978 “**Illness as Metaphor**”, something was weird on this attempt of metaphorizing biology into literary terms. And this was just the very beginning.

Nowadays, being born is a medical issue, pregnant of metaphors; sex is a medical issue, totally protected/wrapped in metaphors; dying is a medical issue, disguised in metaphors; health is a medical issue, masked as metaphors, like the *plague doctors* of ancient past; eating is a metaphor, cooked in odd microwave crucible; fears are medical issues, metaphorized in syndromes. What has been left to man of his own body to be called his own? Very little.

As man has most of his life “protected” by institutions - be them schools, churches, government, hospitals, fraternities, neighboring associations – he has emphasized his social being. By behaving as a member of different groups, he has lost his intimate identity, his own contact with his body; and from the Christian division of body/soul, he has come to the metaphor of being something that maybe no longer represents him, that maybe is too jurassic to shelter his self-intended hightech and social ID. After all, we came to believe we are the image we have projected of ourselves in our mobile phones, in all the evolutionary scale of our mirrors. We are eternal, we are perfect, we are efficient. We can be logged in everywhere, by everyone, anytime.

How have we gotten so distant from darkness, if darkness meant first of all the cozyness of the uterus, the safe moving through shady trees, the possibilities of dim roads of doubts, the post-sunset hour where we knew we could anchor our dreams? In which point of history have we taken this *24 hour light-on* road, forgetting all about the mysteries of the night, beneath which we could both bury and dig beasts and fairies?





From the wild world of our genesis to Dante's "*selva oscura*", we did walk a long way, but there was still the live body very present in the pathway. From that point to the splashing of spotlights by which our flashing images reflect what we think might be *human* on the multitude of screens that surround us today is a brand new world. And we have become far more astonishing than Aldous Huxley ever dreamt in 1931.

Dietmar Kamper insisted on bringing the *chiaroscuro* atmosphere to the center of our discussions. After that first lecture in 1992, we met many times during almost a decade: On May 28th, 1996, "*Time as Paradoxal Repetition*". From May 28th to June 1st, 1996, "*Labour as Life*". On August 27th, 1997, "*The Virtual Man, The Vanishing of the Body and the Evanescence of the Senses*". On September 11th and 12th, "*Dreams and Life*". On August 18th, 1999, "*Tracks and Tracing*". On August 25th, 1999, "*Body and Image*". On March 28th, 2000, "*The Living Body, the Dead Body*". On March 31st, 2000, "*Shadows and Contradictions*". And on April 2nd, 2001, the memorable meeting of Dietmar Kamper, Birke Mersmann and Haroldo de Campos, at the Tuca Theater, PUCSP, "*Antropophagy and Theophagy*".

Beyond the linguistic *scenario*, there was profound human communication in a fertile sharing of doubts, of dreams, of fears. We were in a state of permanent contamination: no one that ever attended those meetings left the way they had started. We were all moved and connected. This was a very efficient strategy of breaking the condom protection over our bodies, as had been stated by Dietmar Kamper in 1992.

His death brought a natural suspension of the organic matter that was the thread of his relationship with the world. Now, as we prepare to overcome the sorrow of his departure, we turn back to our notes of all those meetings and we discover that all that material was not sleeping inside notebooks. Instead, it fled away and has become the new organic matter of our thoughts. Who are we? Who is Dietmar Kamper? It's better to talk about "we", a new self being molded from inside out. It's a hard task to tell one from the





other, as the contaminated matter has changed into new matter. The alchemic process has taken place and keeps life going on. The mourning time has gone.

2. *São Paulo-Berlin: A Semiotic Maracatu*

Being the kind of animals able to represent every single fact of the universe into linguistic signs and maybe later reaffirming them into images, gestures, musical notes and shapes, *homo sapiens* was proud at first. A feeling of accomplishment, “as if we were gods”, as the famous sentence of the 70s announced.

Producing languages, signs, any form of communication was definitely something to bring about this special feeling.

Capable of understanding the laws of the universe, the age of the Earth in the layers of land beneath his feet, the memory kept in his genetic code, the footprints of time in the soil and in the skeletons of the fossils buried around, the voice of the ancestors kept in the folk tales that one generation tells the next one – all that brought about a tendency to overestimate man’s own capacity to generate history. And religion, the mythological creation of gods. Metapower, tautological movement of creator/creation giving hands in neverending *cirandas* (round dancing).

But roads take to roads, as Robert Frost puts in his “A Road Not Taken” (“**yet knowing how way leads on to way**”), and man has moved from a position of being proud of his own capacity of producing semiosis, to a lost gaze where he tries to see what was seen before but he no longer can tell the difference from what his eyes pierce to what has been framing the seen world in his mind - as seeing is a building-up-the-world activity rather than a visual discrimination. Man can only see what he has been framed to see.

From detailing the world and classifying it and changing it into linguistic and semiotic codes, man has arrived on a threshold of non-identification.





This has gone so far as to man having lost the possibility of telling the difference between his own body and any image of his body. In the past, this would be a foolish task: asking anyone to tell the difference between the body and the image of the body. But as soon as man learned to live only with his eyes as a source of knowledge, coming to the extreme “*don’t touch*” motto, man has lost the ability of perceiving the vanishing of his own body. So now he takes the image of the body as his body. A new Narciso and a new Echo takes place.

There are many theories as paths for our understanding of this human behavior. One, as Dietmar Kamper pointed out in several of his lectures among us, is that man wants to run away from his fear of death. Denying mortality provokes a counter movement that brings fear inside. What man intends to broom away is brought inside him. Fear bringing more fear and blindness. The cliff inside is so steep that man dares no longer to look – he replaces the body by an image of the body, ideally rebuilt. No more blood and flesh, but virtual realities of a poor and decadent biology. *A brave new body*.

3. *What Are We Made Of, Made Of?*

What are all folks made of, made of?

What are all folks made of?

Fighting a spot and loving a lot,

That's what all folks are made of.

(traditional)

The quotation above is the underlying matter of the traditional two-stanza nursery rhyme attributed to Robert Southey “*what are little girls made of, made of/ what are little boys made of, made of?*” Should we indeed be made of “fighting a spot and loving a lot”, Wilhelm Reich’s favorite epigraph to several of his books: “*Love, work and*





knowledge are the wellsprings of our life. They should also govern it” (Reich,1983:5)

proves to be a register of wisdom, as we shall agree that to be eligible to love and to work we need to be knowledgeable. And here we welcome Dietmar Kamper’s own words:

Work is responsible for the creation of the new man and this new man is one of the oldest dreams of the European tradition, the philosophical stone, the gold searched by the alchemists, and also, the quintessence searched by the alchemists that has always been understood as a rising movement of the matter, in which the four elements end up refining, getting to be nobler, and the result would be a process of spiritualization that would have to bring to an end to this already mentioned ascending to heavens, this farewell to Earth. (Kamper,1998:52)

This way leads, according to Kamper, to a cross, a *carrefour*, where work and love meet before life flows into death, the destiny of evolutionary beings. This mixture is what underlies our earthly DNA and brings us to the paradigms of life. From this plateau Kamper proposes his utopia: to recreate life out of a new form of freedom. Not the freedom of a former slave who dreams of becoming a master, but the freedom of a new alchemic man: the one who is able to get rid of his head, of his reason – the reason which has been historically built and it is the script of domination.

I dare to say that Dietmar Kamper found in Brazil the possibility of this new anti-reason that he had been talking about. And it was only possible to be found here due to the inheritance of the native Indian tradition (in a myriad of nations), plus the tradition the many nations from Black Africa have brought to this country. It was with great pleasure that he turned to the Brazilian native Indian universe in his last years. And it was not a coincidence that he, Birke Mersmann and Haroldo de Campos presented, in his last lecture in São Paulo, the most astonishing performance on *antropofagia*, when ideas were being eaten, digested and discarded in front of an audience totally pleased for taking part in that esthetic process. A physical and intelectual *satori* to echo forever in our memory.





As Carl G. Jung once wrote: **“In confinio mortis” and on the afternoon of a long life rich of content, one’s eyes often open to unsuspected distances. (Jung,1986:86)**

Our task is to keep looking in the direction Dietmar Kamper’s eyes were pointing at those last moments. Maybe just to discover our own hearts at that spot starting off at the neverending trip of self-knowledge.

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