

Interview on the 'Interior Body' with Jean-Luc Nancy

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QUESTIONS

Please note not all interview questions are accessible in the corresponding video:

1. I want to begin with the theme of on touching—some of your earliest work. I'll here refer to the Latin terminology of which you are aware and have written on *Noli me tangere* meaning "touch me not" during this time of self-isolation and quarantine (meaning a period of forty days, though we are past this now), not only as a period of social distancing, but one of uncertain "mutation" (a state of seeming dormancy during which something is developing). What are we learning or relearning about touch during the Covid-19 global pandemic? (This question can be linked to the performing arts, including dance, which profoundly and fundamentally rely upon touch as the principal sense of their making—more generally, what are some of the ways you are perceiving the performing arts are affected by this pandemic?)

2. In *Corpus* you write: "the body, the skin: the rest is anatomical... Muscles, tendons, nerves and bones, humours, glands, and organs are cognitive fictions... But *the truth is skin*. Truth is in the skin, it makes skin: an authentic extension exposed, entirely turned outside while also enveloping the inside..." p. 159. The skin, we could say, resonates of the comings and goings of 'dawn', it is of melanges, reiterations, and inventions. There is much to say here around what you've aimed at by "the truth is skin." You might want to elaborate on this or go one step further, by inquiring into images. Images, as you note, arise in-between bodies. *What is the relationship between the skin and the image* (in the sense of, for me, something that brings together while at the same time parts or sharing apart and parting—psyche's indeterminacy/emptiness that lending itself entirely to the operations of bodies, their 'absenting/dislocation/spacings')?

3. Following up from the previous question and now linking this discussion to your piece for the anthology *line bridge body: Performance Across the Arts*. In *Corpus* you write that "body is the organ of sense"—"I'll never know my body" and "An other is a body because a body is an other." In "The Interior Body" you make the difference between the body and the organs—

"the organs" you write "are not the body." Here you are making a subtle distinction between the organs and the body, one that is further made between psyche and soma as well.

I am wondering if this distinction does not epistemologically reinforce what is known and what is not known of the body, thereby realigning body with mind (distinct from psyche) but away from the organs. Perhaps you can elaborate on this. I am also thinking of kinesthetic empathy or sympathy in movement, dance, and other performing arts, that have their starting point the organs, nerves, joints, muscles, themselves—the impetus is to move let's say with the spine, kidneys, ovaries, anus, as a way to attune to the wisdom of the organs. Besides the growing Western somatic tradition, there are also Eastern practices, like let's say Chinese medicine, that are built on a delicate knowledge of the organs themselves.

4. I recently began reading a text called "SPK: Turn Illness into a Weapon" which connected with your piece. The authors write the following:

"Take the medical map and see your brain colonized and governed by names (and by the correlated medical methods!) like Parkinson, Alzheimer, Bleuler, and so on, your stomach by Billroth, your neck with the thyroid gland by Basedow. your muscles and your (perhaps so-called hysteroid) behaviour by Charcot and Freud and associate what Marxians have taken down about imperialism - yet far away from a so-called free market. An imperialism done all around the transplant banks now. An imperialism dealing with the organs of e.g. children here and now just as far away with countries and peoples, as noted in the Marxian books. During the times more remote there existed astrological maps in which the governors of your brain took names like moon (luna) or cancer. The governors of your muscles Mars and so on. Those oldy names which nevertheless represent still existing pathways and exchange banks for other demons and devils, possessing and obsessing, interested in imperialism, but enemies of every kind of revolution concerning both, namely cosmic and social matters... In future there will exist more and more groups formed by special forces of illness. developing real individuation (MFE). A special force of illness is mania which if developed collectively, works like a musical species (Musikgattungswesen, nicht harmlos) killing all discipline by transcendence.... Make use of your own experiences about illnesses and put fantasy into action. Those things are meant if there is the question about how to be up to date. TURN ILLNESS INTO A WEAPON is the first glance to a future to be done free of (Endlosungs-) names, governors, health factories and so on. We call it Utopathie." (xi)

I am very much interested in this notion of the colonization and imperialism of the organs, our organs, as you also note, governed by the medical model in the interest of socio-political control and discipline. Our organs approached only by way of the exterior look, by, as you say, the "techniques of penetrating vision." How might the organs and their flows be activated toward resistance, against the very forces that capture and coopt into the capitalist machinery? How might we resist the capture of the organs in the body or organ of capital? Said in other words, what are, how are, which way are, bodies "with revolutionary force"?

5. You note that “equality is the *condition* of bodies” (*Corpus* p. 47). Can you elaborate on this non-hierarchical perspective of bodies? I am wondering what your perspective of *animism* is, as animists believe that all things are animate and alive—thereby granting a kind of equality to all that exists. (This question can be linked to a plethora of things, images, pathology, illness, technology, resistance).

6. Finally, I want to conclude with a question of freedom, as I have before. Freedom for me is nothing but *relational*—a mutuality. In the *The Birth to Presence* you write that: “The freedom that speculative spirit grasps is self-determined, and so sublates all determination. Yet determination itself is first grasped not in autonomy but in *heteronomy*. Could freedom, like magnetic sleep, be given by another? Speculative spirit prefers not to think so, cannot think so. It designates heteronomy as pathology. But in pathology, an insurmountable—and perhaps constitutive—affection of its own freedom stymies it, fascinates it. Not that hypnotism should be thought of as a liberating force... But this means that philosophical speculation about ‘pathology,’ and the general determination of affected being as ‘pathology,’ both depend directly on thinking of freedom as the pure self-positing and pure self-production of waking consciousness. Ultimately, the soul’s sleep would require another thinking of freedom” (p. 21).

You continue to write the following on freedom in *Corpus* “there is no free body, there is no freedom incarnate” (p. 103). Since freedom cannot merely be assumed, but is granted relationally, is activated in practice with others, what are some of the ways in which we, as embodied beings, might practice opening up the space for the freedom of an/other (as that which reverberates in our souls—please feel free to interpret with respect to artistic practice too)? During this global pandemic we have seen pre-existing inequalities becoming more visible and exacerbated, carrying along with them potential to spark socio-political and ecological transformations. The question of freedom, among others, has re-emerged within this shifting reality. What are some of the interventions and practice you deem important at this definitive time?