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## BODY, PLASTICITY AND THE LIMITS OF "SELF" AS PARADIGMATIC MARKERS OF THE META-MODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

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*Understanding of the human position in the chronotypes of contemporaneity requires the re-actualization of the themes of a body, its plasticity and one's own "self" boundaries awareness. The theme of human plastic experience taken as a kind of a person's self-metamorphosis articulates the motives of transcending and leaves aside ideological descriptive stereotypes. The purpose of the article is a clarification and drawing the image of an individual in the meta-modern situation in the aspect of his corporeality and, more specifically, the plastic manifestations of the corporeality. The concept of plasticity is taken as a capacity to concurrently receive and bestow forms. Plasticity is a way of human autho-representation both in the existential ("self" dimension) and physical space. Living in the world, we leave our traces for the Others. In this respect, corporeality is at the same time an accident of plasticity (it is, in the Hegelian sense, plastically phenomenal), and creates such plastic phenomena as the resonating body-membrane of phenomenologists, a body without organs (A. Artaud and J. Deleuze) or the catastrophic body (J. Nancy). Thus, an imaginary, conceivable, projected or phantom body can exist as a plastic "projection" of a subject, whose self-formation is carried out through non-mechanical changes. The human dimension can be viewed through the metaphors of movement, corporeality and plasticity, because this is how the formation and space-fication of human intentions takes place.*

*The article examines the possible philosophical and anthropological ways and methods to study and describe the traces of human corporeality nowadays. Philosophical anthropological discourse appears a reconstruction and reading of individual's "imprints" among various cultural markers and demarcations. Sensitivity to individually unique bodily experience is to be included into the wider context of universalizing philosophical view. Since existential space is a special "place" where all the spatial dimensions attain utterly personal meaning, a territory without boundaries, a position without borders, the "main point of our conscious life where we recreate the world every time anew", where "all habitual connections are taken out of the world and we appear face to face with it", any description of human movements has to consider this duality of outward-inward oscillation and "Self"/"the Other" coexistence.*

*The solution to the anthropological problem of today could be in a return to the historical stage of the subject both as an actor and the author of himself responsible for his own life. It is in plasticity, through fragility of corporeal forms and ease of movements, the spirit of the new sincerity can be traced directly, due to the capability of our body to combine both the obvious (physical forms and social imprints) and the hidden (mental movements) in a person. To our mind, such a productive*

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*exploratory optics could be provided by the attitude represented in metamodernist methodology which re-thinks fundamental questions of human being in terms of new phenomenology and "revival" of a human subject.*

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**Key words:** *Metamodernism, Postmodernism, Corporeality, Body, Plasticity, Digression, Spatial Dimension.*

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## **ТІЛО, ПЛАСТИЧНІСТЬ ТА МЕЖІ "Я" ЯК ПАРАДИГМАТИЧНІ МАРКЕРИ МЕТА-СУЧАСНОЇ АНТРОПОЛОГІЇ**

**Я. І. Артеменко**

*Розуміння місця людини в хроноטיפах сучасності потребує реактуалізації тем тіла, його пластики та усвідомлення меж власного "я". Тема людського досвіду пластики тіла, як свого роду самометаморфози особистості, артикулює проблему трансцендування та залишає осторонь ідеологічні описові стереотипи.*

*Метою статті є з'ясування та опис образу особистості в метасучасній ситуації в аспекті її тілесності, а конкретніше – пластичних проявів тілесності. Поняття пластичності сприймається як здатність одночасно приймати і віддавати форми. Пластичність є способом авторепрезентації людини як в екзистенціальному ("я" вимірі), так і у фізичному просторі. Живучи у світі, ми залишаємо свої сліди для Інших. У цьому відношенні тілесність є водночас випадковістю пластичності (вона є, у гегелівському розумінні, пластично феноменальною), і створює такі пластичні явища, як резонуюче тіло-мембрана феноменологів, тіло без органів (А. Арто та Ж. Дельоз) або катастрофічне тіло (Ж. Нансі). Таким чином, уявне, мислиме, спроектоване чи фантомне тіло може існувати як пластична "проекція" суб'єкта, самоформування якого здійснюється через немеханічні зміни. Людський вимір можна розглядати через метафори руху, тілесності та пластики тіла, адже саме так відбувається формування та фіксація людських інтенцій. У статті досліджуються можливі філософсько-антропологічні шляхи й методи дослідження та опису "слідів" людської тілесності в сучасних умовах. Філософсько-антропологічний дискурс постає спробою реконструкцією і прочитанням "відбитків" особистості серед різноманітних культурних маркерів і демаркацій. Чутливість до індивідуально унікального тілесного досвіду має бути включена в ширший контекст універсалізаційного філософського погляду. Оскільки екзистенційний простір — це особливе "місце", де всі просторові виміри набувають абсолютно особистого значення, територія без кордонів, позиція без кордонів, "головна точка нашого свідомого життя, де ми щоразу заново створюємо світ", де "все звичні зв'язки вилучаються зі світу, і ми постаємо віч-на-віч із ним", будь-який опис людських рухів повинен враховувати цю подвійність коливань назовні-всередину та співіснування "Я"/"Інший".*

*Стверджуємо, що вирішення антропологічної проблеми сьогодення могло б полягати у поверненні на історичну сцену суб'єкта і як актора, і як автора самого себе, відповідального за власне життя. Саме в пластиці тіла, крізь крихкість тілесних форм і легкість рухів, безпосередньо простежується "дух нової щирості", завдяки здатності нашого тіла поєднувати як явне (фізичні форми та соціальні відбитки), так і приховане (психічні рухи) в людині. На нашу думку, така дослідницька оптика може бути забезпечена настановою, представленою у метамодерністській методології, яка переосмислює фундаментальні питання людського буття в термінах нової феноменології та "відродження" людського суб'єкта.*

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**Ключові слова:** *метамодернізм, постмодернізм, тілесність, тіло, пластика, відступ, просторовий вимір.*

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**Introduction of the issue.** The anthropological situation of our time can be described in terms of dynamic fluctuation or oscillation. The opposite poles of digressive movements for an

individual today appear both their own center (*Cogito-intentions*) and periphery (the sphere of centrifugal self-extension up to dissolving in the *every other*), as

well as the cultural models of modernity and postmodernity.

**The purpose of the research.** The purpose of the article is a clarification and drawing the image of an individual in the meta-modern situation in the aspect of his corporeality and, more specifically, the plastic manifestations of the corporeality.

**The outline of unresolved issues brought up in the article.** Our understanding of the human position in the chronotypes of contemporaneity requires the re-actualization of the themes of a body, its plasticity and one's own "self" boundaries awareness [2]. It seems to us that our historical reality as a cultural space-time of remembrance and nostalgia for the integrity and meaningfulness of human life contributes to the return to the motives of self-determination and self-realization.

**Analysis of recent research and publication from which the solution to this problem was initiated.** The border of a body as a flexible protective membrane of a "self" and the dividing line between "I" and "not-I", does not coincide with the limits of human transgressiveness which can go far beyond one's experience. Bodily plasticity, from the cellular growth or dance trajectories in the space captured by a dancer, and to the creation/destruction of new forms out of one's body, is a topic worthy of current philosophical anthropology attention. To our mind, the theme of human plastic experience taken as a kind of person's self-metamorphosis articulates the motives of transcending and leaves aside ideological descriptive stereotypes.

The article is inspired by Natalia Chumak's PhD thesis *Human Plastic Self-expression as a Cultural and Anthropological Phenomenon*, defended at the National university named after V.N. Karazin (Kharkiv) in May, 2021 [1]. The problems raised by the author, such as the correlation between corporeality and plasticity, *constructive capitulation* to the body, the search for ways to restore harmonious body being in the spirit of

M. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, where human plasticity is seen as a way of "embedding" into the environmental project, became the main impact and reason for this publication. From the instrumental point of view, terminology is both the key to understanding the phenomenon and the way to carry it in the life strategies. The key terminological pair in our study is the correlating concepts of "plasticity" ("plastic") and "body" ("corporeal") [6].

The concept of plasticity is taken in the aspect intended by the French researcher C. Malabou, as a capacity to concurrently receive and bestow form which includes both expression through self-formation and a sort of breakdown catastrophe [5].

Thus, plasticity includes both the moment of becoming and self-imprinting, an expression that can appear in movement, rupture, renewal or destruction. This understanding is broader than the physicalist or mechanistic reductionism interpretations of plasticity as the creation of visible or tactilely perceived forms, that is, something detached from their carrier. Plasticity, therefore, is the ductility of the inner space-time, which create a form as an instrument of interacting with the world.

In this respect, corporeality is at the same time an accident of plasticity (it is, in the Hegelian sense, *plastically phenomenal*), and creates such plastic phenomena as the resonating body-membrane of phenomenologists, a body without organs (A. Artaud and J. Deleuze) or the catastrophic body (J.-L. Nancy). Thus, an imaginary, conceivable, projected or phantom body can exist as a plastic "projection" of a subject, whose self-formation is carried out through non-mechanical changes. A body is a catastrophic phenomenon, it is a bare anxiety (J.-L. Nancy: *The Muses* (1996), *The Experience of Freedom* (1993), *The Birth to Presence* (1993) *The Speculative Remark* (2001) and other).

**Results and Discussion.** To study the problem, we have chosen the approach that, in our opinion, would be the most efficient for its comprehension.

Considering the state of today's culture, such an approach can be described as a *meta-modernist* methodology which is based on the experience of "death" and "rebirth" of a subject. According to Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker, the current cultural situation is caused by the facts that the ecosystem is dangerously disrupted, the financial system is becoming unmanageable, the geopolitical structure has lost its stability [6], and humanity is in crisis as a result of its arrogance and apathy. Continuous game of *differance* made this crisis even deeper. The crisis of self-identification manifests itself not only in the dispersal of the individual *self* in the miscellaneous situational images but also in the human avoidance of identifying oneself deeper than socially framed representations do.

According to the researchers, culture has experienced the tiredness of the scattering and loss of meaning-making dominants. Nowadays it oscillates between the experience and practice of two paradigms which are the postmodernist *parataxis* and modernist *futuristic expectations*.

Fluctuations of the historical pendulum "between the enthusiasm of modernism and postmodern irony, between hope and melancholy, between innocence and awareness, empathy and apathy, unity and multiplicity, integrity and division, clarity and ambiguity" [6] denotes the moving coordinates of being in culture.

Common sense insists on finding a place for a person in a world that has survived the digital revolution, the euphoria of multiculturalism, the experience of terrorist attacks and the shock of global isolation in a very short time. This task is complicated not only by the rapid dynamics of social processes, but also by the fact that the very definition of a human today, with our cultural and civilizational experience, can be formulated only with great caution, almost apophatically. Today it has become clear that "I" includes not "only" my Cogito, my body, my place in

space and time, my function, my social roles, my environment, my difference or my circumstances. The anthropological situation in which the perplexed subject seeks himself, the situation "between", "atopic metaxis", according to Vermeulen and Akker [9], requires a view of a human and culture, not tired, but enriched by the practices of both great narratives and historical distinction.

The human dimension can be viewed through the metaphors of movement, corporeality and plasticity, because this is how the formation and space-fication of human intentions takes place.

Thus, the task of philosophical and anthropological discourse appears as a reconstruction, reading of human "imprints" among various cultural markers and demarcations.

The essential principle of metamodernist reconstruction in the discourse of corporeality is its aesthetic-ethical optics. By aesthetic ethics, we mean the double movement of aestheticizing of moral discourse and reviving optimism, empathy, responsibility, and involvement as the main motives of cultural practices. Thus, criticism (understanding "where" a human is now) and historical retrospection (comparing one's own experience to the cultural context and historical background) are combined with the provisions of the new metaphysics (the individual is taken as a non-discrete author of himself) and romantic conceptualism (the intention to reflect the *absolute* in the *changeable* along with a full awareness of the utopian character of this project). As the examples of such aesthetic-ethical practices, there can be considered any cultural creativity aimed not at an arbitrary combination of meanings (as postmodernism seeks), but at filling the traditional values with new meanings. Moreover, the understanding of the impossibility for the artist to get out of the "if" format, a kind of phenomenological *epoche*, must remain constant: *if* it were actually possible to remove from the world the given or usual

"settings" and find oneself in the absolute point of his pure understanding or, at least, sensibility. The typical examples of such a practice include *Slow Art* projects focused on thoughtful living of everyday life situations, works in the genre of *alternative history*, *inclusive dance*, *neo-romantic painting*, *architectural nostalgic imitations*, musical *remixes*, *vintage motifs of modern fashion*, creation of urban *soundscape objects* and so.

The bodily vector of the "return" of a subject as a holistic and conscious author of his own intentions seems to be a real project today. The *obedient body* of modernism [1:53], tamed by will and social censorship, loses its center in the *relaxed body* of postmodernism [1:123]. Postmodernist paradigm questions the significant constants of modernity, such as an inevitable Cogito, appraising glance of the Other and the sacredness of tradition and community. Therefore, in the postmodernist studies, virtuality is thought of as absolute freedom of movement: the boundaries of one's own "I" are blurred, and the stability of *self* is replaced by search for reflections in the phantom images of the network.

Metamodernism as a new cultural paradigm, on the contrary, tries to put together the lost integrity of an individual. The body in which the experience of meeting the world is clearly imprinted (through the practices of "education", "improvement", touch, repulsion, rejection, scarring or "growing up") is seen as evidence of its own live existence. The plasticity of a body in the real dimension, as a way in which it changes itself and captures space in the prospect of the metamodernist optics is seen not as a burden on the virtual body freedom, but rather its articulation. Using therapeutic metaphors, we can compare the approaches to solving anthropological problems. If postmodern culture gives a person deprived of the opportunity to move freely a space of unlimited virtual freedom, metamodernism invents an "exoskeleton" for a person: it does not cancel injuries

or even fractures, it builds a supportive framework and returns it to act on his own behalf. The material for such an "exoskeleton" can be any fragment of the real world, including the physical existence of the Other. The vivid example of such a construction could be *The Sleeping Project* by Lee Mingwei (2000), built on the idea of sharing the life space with strangers [6], or installations by Damien Hirst [4], in whose pain, death and passion mark themselves and acquire a horrible unreduced reality.

In part, the reconstructive aesthetic of metamodernism can be taken as a cognitive strategy. This methodology is characterized by the restoration of the dialectic of the immanent and transcendent - body and nature, I and the Other, a human and God - due to a kind of "methodological permission" for the existence of metaphysics as a fundamental structure for the human world. Therefore, observations of various states and movements of the body in space, its reactions, gestures, even changes in speed and range of motion, distortion of space due to changes in optics (Paul Virilio) can be seen as evidence of the relationship between a human and the world. Such a strategy corresponds to the principles of romantic conceptualism, for which depth and metaphysical meaning become relevant again and rehabilitate *vita activa*, or, according to Raoul Eschelman, is a severe coercion to solve the problem posed by the author exactly in a way suggested by the author [3].

The association of plasticity (as the creation and destruction of forms) with humanity reflects the integrity and weight of the subject of culture. The human body acquires weight, outlines and boundaries as the gaze covers the horizons of the possible, touch determines the boundaries of its own "I", a collision with the unknown cause's deviation, a *clinamen*, and encountering the hostile leaves scars.

Plasticity can be not only subjective (to be an outward movement, an explication of a *self*, a way, according to

N. Chumak, of the human self-realization [1]), but also objective. The modern manipulative technologies mentioned by the author of the dissertation transform the body into an economic, political, sexual or artistic object, which in fact means the object of control and coercion. The pervasive irony of postmodernism does not remove the problem of man's alienation from his own body. Irony is a position of maximum decentralization, distinction and an ability to see "historically different" even in one's *self*. Therefore, plasticity for the postmodernism is a collage combination of elements, heterogenic but synchronously superimposed next to each other in such a way that the dynamics of change is leveled, the event loops on itself, fluidity dissociates. Examples of such metamorphoses of plasticity in postmodernism are *coub* video clips, John Baldessari's *actionism*, or Merce Cunningham's "*discrete*" *choreography*.

Metamodernist irony (or, so-called *post-irony*) replaces the neutral-distant optics of postmodernism (which seems to be afraid of seeing things as serious, and therefore threateningly real) with the optics of approach, attentive scrutinizing and interest. The marking of space in metamodernist practices is reminiscent of the classic Dutch *Stilleven* of the seventeenth century, in which the assembly of objects being shifted relative to the axis of symmetry only emphasizes the harmony of composition and "slow" beauty of each element.

The romanticization and even the sacralization of unfilled space, distance and movement in the flowing time acquires in the anthropological dimension of the metamodernism a character of "metaxic" oscillation between self-identity and being-in-response to the time of history. The idea of "easing censorship" of one's own self and its language does not negate the uncompromising metamodernist approach to poles, distances, and delimitations in the value coordinate system. For example, the British artist

Mitch Griffiths re-thinks the traditional values of Western society, giving to the bodies of his characters an overly romantic plastic of Baroque art by means of "slowing down" and even "freezing" their movements against the backdrop of historical and existential catastrophes that unfold in the real time for the observer. However, death, life, feelings are not depreciated in his works but appear their main motive. Metamodernist anthropology sees the individual in a con-centrated way: in the perspective of his ontological unity and concern for his own existence. Not an ironic belief in the soul-spirit-body trinity in a human being, outright concerns about the moral confusion of modern individual, the use of physiological metaphors to describe social behavior and reveal the psychological foundations of distorted plasticity of a body, which in the course, figure, ritual movement and gestures, appear the obvious signs of the metamodernist "new sincerity".

The question arises – is not the actualization of the problems of breaking with nature and alienation of a human from his own body, as well as motives of morality and transcendence, a sort of a new mythology? In our view, it is the balance between the criticism and a constructive practical view that is the key to understanding what changes are taking place in culture today.

The damage and trauma of modern human by alienation from his own body, and even his own intentions, is a product of modern history. Modernism has formed the concept of the *inner man*, which is operationally embedded in a given context. The balance formed between internal control and external requirements – naturalness, or, conversely, civilization – has received in modernity the status of *health* as the highest "bodily" value. Harmony, stability, progress and improvement became the plastic "slogans" of modernity, as they marked the durability of a working self-healing tool. Postmodernism, on the other hand, deprived the body of instrumentality and

forced it into ease. The popularity of such a design element as frameless furniture [1:122] is a vivid symbol of the postmodern attitude to corporeality and the principle of pleasure. The literal relaxed "hanging" of the body in furniture devoid of internal supports and rigid frames is a clear metaphor of postmodern irony about the verticality, restraints, concentration and indifference to the appraising glance of the Other.

The Other no longer observes the "I", his gaze slips past, because the human body becomes permeable, it loses the resistance and plasticity of the object with a dense inner filling. In the same way, the "Other" turns into "any other", losing the character of "my Other" appropriated by "my" position of an observer, partner and judge.

The anthropological dimension of the meta-modern situation is marked by the subject's return from infantile forgetfulness to a state of responsible self-representation. Plasticity (as the formation and preservation of forms) returns in a way of "work on yourself", or, in the words of M. Foucault, "practice of yourself", when an individual must make internal transformations on his own. The solution to the anthropological problem of today could be in a return to the historical stage of the subject both as an actor and the author of himself responsible for his own life. It is in plasticity, through fragility of corporeal forms and ease of movements, the spirit of the *new sincerity* can be traced directly. Due to capability of our body to combine both the obvious (physical forms and social imprints) and the hidden (mental movements) in a person. The body is a kind of crossroads, filled with space in space, ontology in itself or pure "being of existence" (J.-L. Nancy).

Mastering his own body as an instrument of self-realization, the individual is embedded in space, captures it and turns it into a human dimension. Thus, the world of human corporeality identifies the time-space with movement and location. The body is

what informs the world of existence, and to own a body means to merge with a certain environment, to merge with certain projects and to constantly delve into them, according to M. Merleau-Ponty [6]. However, it is important to note that a body is not only a "fusion" of traits or a part of some spatial context; it is also a means of distinction and differentiation. Rhythmics and dance plasticity, for instance, include a collision with different environments. From the moment human plasticity has lost its purely utilitarian functionality it often been the expression of the attitude towards confusing otherness. For example, the famous "Dance of the Savages" from J.-P. Rameau's opera-ballet *Les Indes Galantes* is a naive imitation of "naturalness" felt by a Western author, performer and spectator as an adventure of touching the dissimilar and a series of arbitrary reflections: "I reflect as I imagine how the Other could reflect himself".

Such a game of inclusion and distinction is so all-encompassing today that it prompts the question about the possibility of singling the individual bodily experience out of a complex of social interactions, virtual augmented reality and reflected experiences of the Other. Often, personal "self" could be barely articulated besides the "shared" spatial and motional contexts, like "my environment", "my city" or even "my walks routes" right because of the miscellaneous supra-individual links, social ties and cultural allusions filling these personal demarcations [1:6]. Nevertheless, it is our body and its movements, the things we create and destroy (in other words, plasticity) and the way we represent ourselves in the line of sight of the Other that mark the boundaries of our intra-world possibilities. Sensitive living requires attentive vision, nuanced language of description and culturally rooted comprehension.

Therefore, the project of restoring plastic freedom through "capitulation to

a body" as the ultimate relaxedness [9] seems somewhat utopian.

**Conclusions and research perspectives.** Human body is scarred by encounters with the world, it has an experience of transcendence and finitude which does not contribute to the ease of being in the body. On the other hand, isn't it more threatening to avoid talking about the body as a crossroad of creation and decay, and isn't a new purism awaiting for us in this case, where the physical non-virtual body will be tabooed as a marker of suffering and mortality? Or will the idea of extending of our bodily freedom lead us to total externalization of plastic activity, for instance, to the field of visual arts or to the space of improved trans-humanistic corporeality, a kind of a new technological Frankenstein's monster? These and many other questions are to be posed as the relevant topics of metamodernist anthropological discussions in the nearest future.

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