INTRO /

CORPOREAL POLITICS
BY LÉOPOLD LAMBERT

This book is the second volume of texts curated specifically for The Funambulist since 2011.¹ The editorial line of this second series of twenty-six essays is dedicated to philosophical and political questions about bodies. This choice is informed by my own interest in the (often violent) relation between the designed environment and bodies. Corporeal politics do not exist in a void of objects, buildings and cities; on the contrary, they operate through the continuous material encounters between living and non-living bodies. Several texts proposed in this volume examine various forms of corporeal violence (racism, gender-based violence, etc.). This examination, however, can only exist in the integration of the designed environment’s conditioning of this violence. As Mimi Thi Nguyen argues in the conclusion of this book’s first chapter, “the process of attending to the body — unhooded, unveiled, unclothed — cannot be the solution to racism, because that body is always already an abstraction, an effect of law and its violence.”²

The designed environment does not merely stop at the perceptible limit of the various objects — whatever their size — that surround our bodies: it includes the atmospheric composition of our bodily condition of “Being-in-the-breathable,” as shown by Philippe Theophanidis in the second chapter dedicated to the “biopolitics of teargas warfare.”³ This notion of breathable strikes us for its resonance with the recent political affirmation about the reality of what it means to be an African American body through Eric Garner’s last words before being strangled to death by a New York police officer: “I can’t breathe!”⁴ Fifty-five years earlier, Frantz Fanon had described the colonial conditions under the following terms:

There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history,

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³ Peter Sloterdijk, Terror from the Air, Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009, 47. Philippe Theophanidis, “Caught in the Cloud: The Biopolitics of Teargas Warfare,” in this volume, 14-23.
⁴ Eric Garner was killed by a white NYPD officer in Staten Island on July 17, 2014.
its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing.5

This book does not intend to produce a total or a proper knowledge about the body, since such a production never operates without a violence implicit within it. The most literal example of such a correlation can be found in the active participation of doctors in various forms of modern torture, from the Nazi concentration camps to the CIA’s so-called “enhanced interrogation” techniques, and including the French colonial doctor in Algeria, also described by Fanon.6 This anatomic and biological literality should not however obscure another form of production of knowledge about the body, a less transcendental one: the empirical normative production of social performativites. This present volume attempts to produce knowledge about the conditions through which the body is entangled in mechanisms of power, as well as how it is able, by its very materiality, to implement strategies of resistance against various forms of dominant discursive and physical violence.

As already briefly outlined, the critical treatments offered by this book’s contributors allow to go much further than the usual (and often blindly obsessivel!) arguments developed in my own writings for The Funambulist.7 Although the readers won’t find indications about the disciplinary background of the contributors — the “witty” self-descriptions at the end of the book being preferred to academic resumés — the content of the texts will certainly attest to the broad imaginaries at work throughout this volume. Dialogues between dancers and geographers, between artists and biohackers, between architects and philosophers, and so forth, provide the richness of this volume through difference rather than similarity.

Some of the authors here consider bodies as moving assemblages (Hanna Baumann, Grégoire Chamayou, Adrienne Hart), others as sites of normative violence (Mimi Thi Nguyen, Tings Chak, Alex Shams, Sofia Lemos), others as the (sometimes esoteric) generative source of their material environment (Pedro Hernández Martínez, Alan Prohm, Erin Manning, Dan Mellamphy), and one author even interprets the notion of the body in its non-human characteristics (Renisa Mawani): approaches are as rich as various. For this reason, I would like to formally thank the twenty-seven friends and contributors for having dedicated the time and efforts to their texts presented here. Together, we form a community of ideas that, I hope, will prove useful both for us and for our readers.

5 Frantz Fanon, A Dying Colonialism, New York: Grove Press, 1994, 47.
7 See the volumes of The Funambulist Pamphlets (Brooklyn: punctum books, 2013-2015) to be convinced of it.